OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD
BY TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER
based on The Playmaker by Thomas Keneally

WORKPACK
by Gillian King
produced in association with the
THEATRE MUSEUM
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
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INTRODUCTION

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Dear Colleague

Here is Out of Joint’s workpack for the 1998 production of Our Country's Good. I hope you find it useful.

“The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.” [L P Hartley]
Any production set in the past has to discover what these differences are, and a lot of the exercises I do with actors in the early weeks of rehearsal try to focus on that. There are some simple questions to answer: What did they eat? How much did they drink? Impossible questions like: How much did it hurt to receive one hundred lashes? And intriguing questions like: What did Mary Brenham think of calling her daughter after Ralph Clark’s wife? Why did people become criminals? (We played the Transportation Game in rehearsals to explore this particular question).

In the scene called 'The Meaning of Plays', Arscott says “can we get on with rehearsal and stop talking”. It's a common belief that doing things is fun but talking about them is less interesting. It's not as simple as that: no exercises or improvisations can be very detailed unless you have absorbed the information first. Read the first few chapters of The Fatal Shore by Robert Hughes. Remember that most of the characters in Our Country’s Good were real people whose lives began before and ended after the play itself. Some of the most unlikely events in the play are true. Robert Sideway did start Sydney’s first professional theatre company when he had served his “seven years servitude” and Dabby Bryant, her husband, and her two young children made the longest voyage then recorded in an open boat when they escaped. If you look at a map of Sydney Harbour you will see Clarke Island where Ralph had his vegetable garden, several other places are named after characters in the play.

Throughout the rehearsal process I used ‘actioning’ which I learnt when working with Bill Gaskill when we ran Joint Stock in the 70s. I also used playing cards to clarify characters' status and acting choices. These techniques are explained in the workpack.

I look forward to meeting some of you in the workshops or at the theatre.

Best wishes,

Max Stafford-Clark
THE GEORGIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The Georgians had the harshest judicial system in Europe. Britain's prisons were overflowing due to extremely harsh sentences for criminals. The Government inflicted these harsh laws in direct response to public opinion. The "public" wanted severe punishment for those crimes committed against property (i.e. theft). This "public" was less concerned with crimes against the self (i.e. murder).

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PUNISHMENT

WATKIN TENCH (John Locke)
In *Our Country's Good* [Act Two, Scene One] Tench argues that the criminal tendency is innate and definitive - "If you commit a crime, you are a criminal". Tench is a Lockeian. John Locke believed that criminals should enjoy no more rights than a slave, there is no room for redemption.

GOVERNOR PHILLIP (John Howard)
Governor Phillip believes that the convicts are not inherently evil, and with compassion are capable of reform. He represents John Howard whose belief in universal sin was the basis for this argument.

DAVID COLLINS (William Godwin)
The most dominant argument of the late 18th Century was led by William Godwin and is represented by Collins in the play. Godwin believed in reform through exemplary justice; for Collins public hanging could "serve as a sharp example whereas death from flogging was slow and unobserved".

EXERCISE: DEBATE
In your class split up into 3 groups. Each group must take a "philosophy" [even if you disagree personally]. Each member of the group chooses a card from a set of playing cards. If you have a high number or picture card (ace is low) you passionately believe in your chosen philosophy. A lower card means you may be swayed by other arguments. At the end of the session take a vote on which philosophy was argued most convincingly.
Between 1751 and 1800 there were over 1400 people hanged publicly in London. Watkin Tench argues that public hanging was the working people's “favourite form of entertainment”, and Tyburn gallows were the central attraction. Eight times a year unfortunate felons were hanged before hungry crowds of between 3,000 and 7,000 people. Often the numbers soared to mobs of 40,000 people and there are records of a crowd of 100,000 for notorious criminals.

It was a gory and fascinating spectacle, many took several minutes to die. In 1802 Governor Wall dangled for 15 minutes before he died. The noose had slipped behind his neck and in the end the hangman had to pull his legs. This was not unusual, a fact borne out by Thomas Barrett's death in Our Country's Good [Act Two, Scene Six]

Ketch: Remember how he danced and everyone laughed

What do the convicts in Our Country's Good think of hanging and the law?

Sideway: This I am sure of, I shall meet with less cruelty among the most barbarous nations than I have found at home
[Act 2, Scene 5]

Duckling: No way I'm doing a play with a hangman. The words would stick in my throat

EXERCISE: FAMOUS LAST WORDS!
Read Act Two, Scene Six and/or the chapter "Wryneck Day" in The Playmaker (especially page 123)
What were Thomas Barrett's last words?
Was he sincere? What would you say in the same situation?
Would you 'perform and entertain' the crowd?
HOW YOU DIED -
THE GORY FACTS!

The eyes red, projecting
forwards and sometimes
partially forced out of their
cavities...
a bloody froth or frothy mucus
sometimes escaping from the
lips and nostrils... the urine and
faeces are sometimes
involuntarily expelled at the
moment of death.

Henry Fielding
(an Eighteenth century playwright and novelist)

EXERCISE: ACTIONING

Look at Act Two, Scene Six, "The Science of
Hanging": Read it through in groups. Why
doesn't Liz speak initially? After each
sentence or thought choose a transitive
('doing') verb that describes what the
character is feeling or trying to do. e.g.

(confronts)
Ketch: I don't want to do this
(bullies)
Harry: Get on with it, Freeman.
(prepares)
Ketch: (to Liz) I have to measure you.

REPIEVED OR DAMNED
FURTHER?

Many characters in Our Country's Good were
given a "conditional pardon". This meant that
their death sentences were commuted to
transportation. Why, Governor Phillip asks, was it
necessary to erect another Tyburn in Australia?
Because public physical punishment was a
display of the power of the State over the
individual and there was nowhere that the State
needed to assert its authority more strongly than
in a penal colony. The "authorities" in Australia
believed that they had to achieve order before
they could offer justice, and it is not surprising
that Collins warns Phillip that the "edifice will
collapse without the mortar of fear".
(Act One, Scene Three)

EXERCISE:
THE
TRANSPORTATION
GAME

Get into small groups.
Each group creates a
communal character and
their biography. Your character legitimately earns
£20 a year. To survive you need £40 a year. You
are therefore likely to be forced to commit crimes
to cover this shortfall. One person (possibly the
teacher) is the dealer and deals each group three
cards. Look at your cards. These cards will
indicate the criminal activity you undertake for
survival. A low card could be stealing a loaf of
bread, a high card could be grand theft and arson.
Choose your crimes to fit your cards and
characters. Kings and Queens are 'trump cards'.
A King symbolises a 'King's Pardon' - if caught
you can use this to be reprieved. (A local vicar
or a person of high standing has given you a
crime reference). A Queen means you are
pregnant (male characters can swap or give this
card away). If caught you can use this card to
change your sentence from transportation to
imprisonment.

Decide which crime you are going to commit and
place the corresponding card in the centre. Each
group takes it in turn to relate the story of their
crime.

After each story has been told, the Dealer turns
over a card from the remaining pack. If it is the
same suit or the same number you have been
captured and will be hanged or transported for your
crime (the Dealer acts as judge and decides the
sentence). If it is not the same you have got away
with it and have earned the sum of the card.
Obviously the higher the card you choose to
gamble, the sooner you will reach your £40 a year.

SEE WHO SURVIVES AND GOOD LUCK!
DATES AND EVENTS OF THE 18TH CENTURY

EXERCISE

In groups fit the following dates and events together. Add any other dates/events that you can.

1701
A: George I becomes King
1702
B: Anne becomes Queen
1710
C: Tom Jones by Henry Fielding is published
1706
D: Captain Cook “discovers” Australia
1707
E: The first fleet arrives in Australia
1710
F: The King recovers from illness
1713
G: The beginning of the French Revolution
1714
H: The end of Tyburn gallows
1727
I: Wren finishes St Paul’s Cathedral
1740
J: Death of George Farquhar
1741
K: First performance of The Recruiting Officer
1749
L: George II becomes King
1760
M: David Garrick’s theatrical debut
1770
N: Peg Woffington’s theatrical debut
1776
O: First fleet sets sail for Australia
1783
P: The King’s first episode of madness
1787
Q: Treaty of Utrecht ends war of Spanish succession
1788
R: Convict production of The Recruiting Officer
1770
S: Adam Smith writes The Wealth of Nations
1789
T: Jethro Tull’s seed drill improves farming
U: Watt and Boulton produce the first commercial steam engine.
V: George III becomes King
1701
T: Jethro Tull’s seed drill improves farming

1702
B: Anne becomes Queen

1706
K: First performance of The Recruiting Officer

1707
J: Death of George Farquhar

1710
I: Wren finishes St Paul’s Cathedral

1713
Q: Treaty of Utrecht ends war of Spanish succession

1714
A: George I becomes King

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L: George II becomes King

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D: Captain Cook ‘discovers’ Australia

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S: Adam Smith writes The Wealth of Nations

U: Watt and Boulton produce the first commercial steam engines

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H: The end of Tyburn gallows

1787
O: First fleet sets sail for Australia

P: The King’s first episode of madness

1788
E: The first fleet arrives in Australia

1789
F: The King recovers from illness

R: Convict production of The Recruiting Officer

G: The beginning of the French Revolution
HISTORY

The play is set in the late 1780s. George III is on the throne but is suffering from bouts of Polyphonia, a disease that scuttles the mind and makes him periodically unfit to govern (a hereditary disease!). To celebrate the King’s birthday on June 4 1789 Governor Phillip has asked Ralph Clark to “put on a play”. Ralph chooses The Recruiting Officer by George Farquhar which was as popular a production when it was first performed in Drury Lane Theatre in 1706 as Phantom of the Opera or The Mousetrap are today.

What world changing events happened in France in 1789 and in America from the 1770s through to the 1780s? How would these events have affected Great Britain and the colonies?

MUSIC

1719 George Frederick Handel becomes director of The Royal Academy of Music
1721 Bach’s Brandenburg Concertes
1741 Handel’s Messiah
1786 Mozart’s opera The Marriage of Figaro

LITERATURE

1700 Congreve wrote Way of the World (play)
1719 Daniel Defoe wrote Robinson Crusoe (novel)
1749 Henry Fielding wrote Tom Jones (novel)
1755 Samuel Johnson compiled Dictionary of the English Language
1788 Fanny Burney wrote Evelina (novel)
1789 Blake wrote Songs of Innocence (poetry)

EXERCISE

Create your own contrasting boxes for food, fashion, entertainment etc for one of the convicts and one of the officers while they were still living in England. Write a diary page entry for your two chosen characters taking inspiration from your boxed lists.

SHOPPING LIST

FOR THE LOWER ORDERS

Potatoes, Flour, Yeast, Salt
Tea, Soap, Candles, Bleaching
Sugar and Butter (only occasionally)

Daily Menu

Parson Woodford
(1740 - 1803)

Breakfast of oysters, cold tongue, tea

Noon snack

Lunch at 2pm

Larger Supper at 9pm

Annual meat cost £46
Salmon 7d per day
Lamb and Turkey 4½d per day
RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

Ralph: Dreamt, my beloved Alicia, that I was walking with you and that you were in your riding habit - oh my dear woman when shall I be able to hear from you?

On Sunday as usual, kissed your dear beloved image a thousand times - was very much frightened by lightning as it broke near my tent...

Harry: We used to hear you on the ship, Ralph calling for your Betsey Alicia.

Ralph: Don't speak her name on this iniquitous shore.

What makes Ralph change his mind about taking a 'tug woman' for a mistress?

How does he justify his change of opinion?

EXERCISE

Read Act One, Scene Eight of Our Country's Good. What chance do the women have of "reforming" or "improving"? Is there a case for the argument that prison/transportation feeds criminality? Do you have to learn the "ways" to survive?

Was there any way to escape this enforced prostitution?

Was Governor Phillips' desire that the convicts marry and create a new society ever really possible?

What social conditions impeded his wish?
ACTIONING

"An action has to be expressed by a transitive verb and gives the character's intention or tactic for that particular thought. For example, if I was speaking to you at this moment, George, my overall intention for the scene might be to 'teach George'. Along the way the actions I would employ could be 'to interest', 'to grip', 'to instruct', 'to fascinate' or even, and here I would be a bit ambitious, 'to enthrall'. The fact that I could fail with these glorious intentions, and in fact end up puzzling or confusing or even, heavens forbid, boring you, is not my problem as an actor. That's not my intention. One definition of bad-acting would be when an actor plays the result of his action (e.g. 'bores') and not the intention itself (e.g. 'educates' or 'interests'). It's up to the other actors in the scene to play the response, not for the protagonist to act a judgement on himself."

From Letters to George by Max Stafford-Clark

EXERCISE

Ralph: I've never looked at the body of a woman before.

Mary: Your wife?

Ralph: It wasn't right to look at her. Let me see you.

Mary: Yes.

Ralph: Let me see you.

Mary: Yes.

[He begins to undress himself]

At the beginning of each line choose a verb that describes the intention of the characters. e.g. entrusts, guides, humours.

This is an acting exercise that the director of Our Country's Good. Max Stafford-Clark works through with the actors. What is the value of this

a) for an actor?

b) for a student?
TRANSPORTATION

Is Australia the New America?

Transportation began in 1650 when felons were sent to America to work on plantations. Over the next 125 years, 50,000 men, women and children were shipped off to the 13 colonies. This ended with the American War of Independence. No longer would the new United States put up with our unwanted criminals. It was not the ‘material’ they needed to build a ‘new land’.

A New Dumping Ground?

America had been a convenient, successful and prosperous dumping ground, but Australia was to prove inconvenient and costly. Now in Australia, prisoners’ upkeep was a financial burden on the government until they died, returned, or chose at the end of their sentence to become free settlers.

The Financial Decider

In The Fatal Shore, Robert Hughes points to the pines and flax of Botany Bay as being the deciding factor. These raw materials, essential for ship making, were the Georgian equivalent of today’s oil and uranium. Transportation began on a massive scale and between 1786 and 1865, 160,000 were sent to Australia. As Keneally points out in The Playmaker, for the convicts themselves Australia seemed further away than the moon, for at least they could see the moon from London!

EXERCISE

In groups discuss where you would have sent the huge number of prisoners.
If our prisons today continue to become overcrowded, what could we do?
Could transportation work today?
If so, where?

No craft, then or later, was ever designed specifically to carry convicts; that would have cost the owner too much for too specialised a vessel... the ‘tween-deck plans for the first fleet transports are lost, but the quarters were certainly very cramped for the marines and crew, let alone for the convicts: four transportees lying in a space seven feet by six feet, the dimensions of a modern king size bed were the norm. There was little headroom; Scarborough, the second largest transport, had only four feet five inches so that even a small woman had to stoop and a full grown man had to bend double.

From The Fatal Shore by Robert Hughes

EXERCISE

Mark out an area 2 metres by 1.5 on the floor. Fill with eight people. Have “guards” or marines patrolling the space. Anyone standing upright, speaking to the wrong person, being generally disobedient or annoying can be extracted by the marines to await a sentence of flogging (possible death). How would this feel for nearly eight months? Imagine the smell, disease, lack of privacy etc.
THE FIRST FLEET
On the morning of Sunday May 17th, 1787, a fleet of ships left Portsmouth Harbour with 16,000 miles and eight months of open sea ahead of them. In the first fleet there were 1,500 people on board. 736 were convicts, of these only 48 died on the voyage - a testament to Governor Phillip's care and navigational skills.

CONDITIONS ON BOARD SHIP
Life at sea was tough whether you were a prisoner or a sailor. The ship was infested with rats, lice, cockroaches and fleas; food and water were scarce, the weather bad and the sea rough.

“...The waves advanced in rank after relentless rank, fifteen feet high from trough to crest... Each had knife edged ridges that rose, disintegrated and reformed. Each had slopes that heaved and transformed themselves into tottering cliffs which collapsed and tumbled in ruin onto the streets below.”
From And Not a Drop to Drink, 1988

EXERCISE
Read Our Country's Good Act One, Scene One and relevant sections from The Fatal Shore and The Playmaker. Create a scene that illustrates what it was like to be on the ship, involving convicts and at least one officer.

Ross: Sideway.... Take your shirt off... One hundred lashes on Sirius for answering an officer. Remember Sideway? Three hundred lashes for trying to strike the same officer. I have seen the white of this animal's bones, his wrecked blood and reeky convict urine have spilled on my boots and he's feeling modest?
Our Country's Good, Act 2, Scene 5

Declan Conlon (Captain Ross) practises his flogging technique, watched by Company and Stage Manager Phil Cameron.
"Everything they had been told about it, even the testimony of Cook's log, was wrong. They had expected grassland with deep black soil and well spaced trees, where crops could be planted without clearing; an ample source of building stone; a protected anchorage.

But what Captain Phillip saw from the deck as his ship rounded point Solander and hauled into Botany Bay on January 18th 1788 was a flat heath of paperbark scrub and grey-green eucalyptus, stretching featurelessly away under the grinding white light of that Australian summer. The dry buzzing monotony of the landscape did not match Cook's account. The bay was open and unprotected, and the Pacific rollers gave it a violent, persistent swell; the water was shallow, and the holding ground poor."

From The Fatal Shore by Robert Hughes

"The place which had been chosen for this far-off commonwealth and prison, and named Sydney Cove in the spirit of events, faced the sun, which here was always in the North. This reminded you, if you thought about it, that home was always on the other side of the sun - eight moons of navigation away if you were lucky, a year or more if not. The land on either side of the cove was divided down the middle by a fresh water stream flowing out of a low hinterland among cabbage tree palms, native cedars, the strange, obdurate eucalyptus trees of a type which (as Ralph was assured by scholars like Davy), occurred no where else in all creation."

From The Playmaker by Thomas Keneally

EXERCISE

Read the above two passages about the arrival in Australia.

In groups, discuss and explore practically how you could adapt these two descriptive passages into a short scene.

Write the scene
Look at this map of Sydney today. How many places are named after subjects or people in the play?
ABORIGINES

AUSTRALIA DISCOVERED?

Contrary to Western belief, Australia was not discovered in 1770. Aborigines had been living there for 30,000 years. In 1788 there were about 300,000 Aborigines in Australia divided between 500 tribes. Originally from Asia these people were regarded as the most primitive of “natives”. The tribes did not share a common language; the people did not read or write; they had no concept of private property or money; and no discernable kings or gods. Their weapons and tools were basic, they did not even use a bow and arrow when hunting.

Fundamentally territorial, the Aborigines were a nomadic people who lived in harmony with their land and for whom tribal land signified more than the European concept of ownership could ever embrace.

How do you imagine the Aborigines would have felt when they first landed in Australia?

How would their feelings have compared with those of the first fleet when they landed?

The Governor of the new colony found himself occupied with the constant menace of starvation and the issue of how to deal with the ‘natives’. He had had official instructions to be as friendly as possible and gather as much scientific knowledge about the Aboriginals as he could muster. While he was prepared for a hostile reception, he did not intend to let violence reign:

"With respect to the natives, it was my determination from my first landing that nothing less than the most absolute necessity should ever make me fire upon them, and the persevering in this resolution has at times been rather difficult. I have hitherto been so fortunate that it has never been necessary"

THREAT OF STARVATION:
Half rations
Convicts primarily from London
No real farming experience
Dense woodland
Hard ground

RATIONS HALVED AGAIN
Ill equipped stores
more convicts arriving...
MORE MOUTHS TO FEED!

Phillip would be “happy to change the convict status into 50 good farmers”
| Ralph:               | When acting you have to imagine things  
|                     | ...now think of a rich lady and imagine you  
|                     | are her (Lizzy begins to masticate) What are  
|                     | you doing?  
| Liz:                | If I was rich I'd eat myself sick.  
| Dabby:             | Me too...potatoes  
| Sideway:           | Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding  
| Caesar:            | Hearts of Palm  
| Wisehammer:        | Four fried eggs, six fried eggs, eight fried eggs  
|                    | Act 1, Scene 11  

**EXERCISE: DEBATE**

Form two groups. Each group chooses a red or black card. If you choose red, you are of Aboriginal descent; black is a British Colonialist. Each person in each group chooses a card - the higher the number the more passionate you are about your subject, the lower the less so.

Debate on who has the right to the land? Should travel, discovery, science and Western civilisation triumph over tribal and native beliefs?

Not only did convicts venture into the bush to steal Aboriginal weapons and to try to look for food, but officers and Governor Phillip made "expeditions" a minor theme of life in the colonies. In 1791 one man describes the arduous trek through the "jungle".

"The march begins at sunrise, and with occasional halts continues until about an hour and half before sunset. It is necessary to stop thus early to prepare for passing the night for toil here ends not with the march. Instead of the cheering blaze, the welcoming landlord and the long bill of fare, the traveller has now to collect his fuel, to erect his wigwam to fetch water and to broil his morsel of salt pork. Let him then lie down and if it be summer, try whether the effect of fatigue is sufficiently powerful to overcome the bites and stings of the myriads of flies and mosquitos, which buzz around him".

**What effect does the appearance of the Aborigine have on the play as a whole?**

"The Aborigine in the play acts like a touchstone, he reflects not just the Aborigines and their culture but the Australian land mass as a whole - "How can we befriend this crowded, hungry and disturbed dream?" [Act 2, Scene 5]. My performance as the Aborigine is not based on research of Aborigines today, but is more an interpretation of the lines and the feeling embodied in the character."

Howard Saddler - actor playing the Aborigine in this production
HOW DID YOU APPROACH PLAYING HARRY BREWER AND HIS DREAMS?

"In The Playmaker, Ralph wonders if maybe Harry has picked up something of the Aborigine philosophy - that is, that our ancestors and friends hang around after they have died until they have resolved their differences with the living. This could certainly apply to Harry.

Harry is in the last stages of alcoholism and is suffering from the DT’s. This is coupled with his obsession with hanging and the horror and fascination with this way of dying. In The Playmaker Harry often visits Newgate gaol to see people the night before they die and even once he has been transported to the new colony of Australia he cannot escape his morbid fascination with hanging.

Instead of dreaming the liberating dreams of an Aborigine, he is cluttered with the repressive, restrictive visions of 18th century England and all that is cruel and inhumane.

In the first half of the scene, Max and I decided to play Harry as a drunk that you might see on an underground platform - talking to himself, muttering, having conversations with people in his head - in the second half the ‘people’ become clearer and actually exist in his physical surroundings, they are in his tent and Harry can now no longer block them or escape from them."

Ian Redford - actor playing Harry Brewer in this production

WHICH PART WOULD YOU PLAY IN OUR COUNTRY’S GOOD, AND WHY?

"Ralph Clark, because he's a good director!"
Max Stafford-Clark - director

Costume design by Julian McGowan
Our Country's Good is a play which explores the very nature of theatre.

"I'm trying to write about how people are treated, what it means to be brutalised, what it means to live without hope, and how theatre can be a humanising force."
Timberlake Wertenbaker,

During rehearsals for The Recruiting Officer, convicts and gaolers alike begin to see the effects of theatre on their society. Phillip persuades Ralph that the rehearsal of the play is important because, like slaves, the convicts need to be able to see themselves as human beings again (Act Two, Scene Two). Ralph notes that by speaking the "well-balanced lines of Mr Farquhar," the women convicts "seemed to acquire a dignity, they seemed...to lose some of their corruption." (Act I, Scene 6).

This is borne out in Act Two, Scene Five when Ross and Campbell invade the rehearsal and the notion of savage convict and human gaoler is severely tested. After this incident, Ascroft argues,

"When I say Kite's lines I forget everything else. I forget the judge said I'm going to have to spend the rest of my natural life in this place getting beaten and working like a slave." (Act 2, Scene 6)

Our Country's Good is a modern play and these arguments have contemporary resonance. During rehearsals for the original production in 1988, Timberlake, Max and some of the actors from The Recruiting Officer went to a performance of The Love of a Good Man at HMP Wormwood Scrubs, given by long-term prisoners.

Timberlake writes that this night "confirmed all our feelings about the power and value of theatre", "One of the actors/prisoners, Joe White, subsequently directed a production of Our Country's Good when he was transferred to Blundeston Prison. Timberlake went to see the production, and the correspondence between Joe and herself is printed in the Methuen student edition of the play.

Joe White is now working as Assistant Director on this production.

"As I approach the latter stage of my sentence, and begin to make my first tentative steps back into the free world, I feel compelled to express my gratitude for the existence of theatre in prisons. Re-emerging into the world, after more than a decade of institutional life, I am more conscious than ever of the scale of my indebtedness. Rather than face a daunting transition steeped in uncertainty and an overwhelming sense of dislocation, I feel able to walk forward with a certain degree of confidence and genuine optimism. There is no doubt that without the bridges that
In Our Country's Good, the Aborigine speaks only four times, but his haunting words give a native Australian reaction to the bewildering events of 1788. ‘Dreaming’, central to the Aborigine’s assessment of the action, is the basis of Aboriginal spirituality. Each tribe had their own version of the myth of Dreamtime.

n the Dreamtime, in the long distant past, giant semi-human beings, behaving like men and women rose out of the featureless plains, where they had been slumbering for countless ages, and started to wander aimlessly over the countryside. As they wandered these dreamtime heroes carried out the same tasks as do the Aborigines of today. Then mysteriously, this dreamtime came to an end, and wherever these creatures had been active, mountain range, isolated hills, valley, watercourse or other natural features now marks the place.”

From The Dreamtime: Australian Aboriginal Myths in Paintings by Ainslie Roberts, 1964

"The Australian Aboriginal Code of Behaviour is based on the saying ‘As it was done in Dreamtime, so it must be done today’ and the landscape itself is their ‘embodied history’, the trees, mountains and animals of Australia are all sacred, all part of the Aboriginal ‘Dreaming’. To deprive the Aborigines of their territory was to condemn them to spiritual death - a destruction of their past. Their future and their opportunities of transcendence.”

From The Fatal Shore by Robert Hughes
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
ACTING STYLES

A load of stupid actors strutting around, shouting with their
chests thrust out so far you'd think their nipples were attached
to a pair of charging elephants.
Blackadder (III)

Acting in the eighteenth century was taken very seriously, there were two schools: Garrick was renowned
for his 'naturalness'; and John Kemble and Sarah Siddons for their 'classicism'. The physicality of the
actors was of the utmost importance to both 'styles'. Each gesture had a universally understood meaning
and was seen as the visual expression or spirit of an actor's passion. Garrick's face was said to look twice
as old as his body because he 'used it so much'. Great importance was attached to clarity, nobility and
ceremony and the techniques were designed so that an actor always looked 'interesting' and 'beautiful'
even in death. Many actors would practice their facial expressions and gestures in a mirror to ensure
perfection!

EXERCISE

Consider how you would perform the following extract from The
Recruiting Officer, using eighteenth century acting styles.

Worthy: What pleasures I may receive abroad
are indeed uncertain; but this I am sure
of, I shall meet with less cruelty
among the most barbarous nations than
I have found at home.

Melinda: Come, sir, you and I have been jangling
a great while I fancy if we made up our
accounts, we should sooner come to an
agreement.

Worthy: Sure, madam, you won't dispute
your being in my debt - my fears,
sighs, vows, promises, assiduities,
anxieties, jealousies, have all run on
for a whole year, without any payment

Melinda: A year! Oh Mr Worthy, what you owe
me is not to be paid
under a seven years' servitude
AN EXPRESSION

GOVERNOR PHILLIP ACT 1, SCENE 6

theatre has provided - both in terms of opportunity and, perhaps more importantly, with regard to maintaining and consolidating a more personal sense of worth and purpose - my reintroduction into society would be considerably less hopeful."


Is it the responsibility of prison governors to teach, educate and hopefully reform prisoners?

Or should prison simply represent a loss of freedom with no opportunities for rehabilitation?

Having played Ralph and directed *Our Country's Good* in prison, what differences do you notice working with a professional theatre company as Assistant Director on this production?

"There are strengths and weaknesses with both: prisoners have a wealth of experience which directly relates to this play, they also have a raw emotional state so if tackled responsibly it can be used as a great asset. What prisoners don't have is any technique - for most of them it is their first experience of acting. Professional actors have the acting tools which makes directing much quicker, there's a shorthand. The difficulty for professional actors is in finding the truth within the play and the characters, therefore a lot of time is spent researching. The resources of a professional production enable you to take the play further, and with this production as we're touring for several months the play has time to progress. In a prison, we could only perform for three or four nights so it was very sad when it finished!"

Joe White - Assistant Director

HOW DOES ACTING IN THE PLAY CHANGE YOUR CHARACTER?

“Unexpected situations are often matched by unexpected virtues, are they not?”

(Governor Phillip - Act 2, Scene 2)

“The play gives Duckling a sense of self-worth and something to hold onto after Harry's death”

Ashley Miller [Duckling]

“Being in the play seems someway to humanise Liz, she begins to see that being part of a society may be an attractive proposition, for the first time in her life she considers that she may have a future”

Sally Rogers [Liz Morden]

“Ketch is allowed to join the society and his acting helps him to gain the respect that he lost as a hangman”

Declan Conlon [Ketch Freeman]
EXERCISE

Examine the gestures on these pages. Can you identify the ‘passion’ that each gesture is intended to represent? (i.e. grief, despair, anger, surprise). In pairs, act out a selection of the gestures. Add a line of dialogue for each gesture which is indicative of the passion you are expressing. You may want to experiment and add some gestures of your own invention.
Sideway: A greeting. Yes. A greeting looks like this
[He extends his arms high and wide]
Plume! Now I’ll change to say the next words, ‘My
Dear Captain’, that’s affection isn’t it? If I put my
hands on my heart like this. Now ‘Welcome’. I’m not
quite sure how to do ‘Welcome’.

Ralph: I think if you just say the line.

(Act 1, Scene 11)

How good a
director is
Ralph?

What sort of advice
does he give?

What research did you
do into 18th century
acting? Could it ever
be a style that comes
into fashion?

Timberlake has grafted our
knowledge of 20th century
acting onto the way Ralph
directs in 1768. Ralph uses
Stanislavskian methods, for
example he tries to
encourage Liz to feel and
respond like an 18th century
lady. I don’t think the style
will come back into fashion.
If I watched a play with all the
gestures and feelings
physically presented I would
probably find it amusing but
frustrating - perhaps it would
be like watching Kabuki
theatre [Japanese theatre].

Stephen Beresford - actor
playing Ralph Clark
EXERCISE

Read and discuss this scene in small groups.

Mary: How can I play Sylvia? She's brave and strong. She couldn't have done what I've done.

Dabby: She didn't spend eight months and one week on a convict ship. Anyway, you can pretend you're her.

Mary: No, I have to be her.

Dabby: Why?

Mary: Because that's acting.

Dabby: No way I'm being Rose, she's an idiot.

Ralph Clark and his actors organise the set and arrange the costumes for the 1788 production. In 1998 a Deputy Stage Manager (DSM) is present throughout rehearsals to assist the director and actors.

“I'm responsible for producing 'the book'. This is a script in which all the changes to the dialogue and all the moves the actors make are recorded. I also note down any decisions or ideas that are made in rehearsals and I relay the information at the end of each day to all the other departments. When Our Country's Good opens I will run the show technically, calling the actors to the stage in time to make their entrances and giving 'cues' to the sound, lighting and 'flying' operators to produce the effect at the right time.

Clare Norwood - DSM

Ralph Clark is referred to as the director in Our Country's Good, but this is a plausible artistic liberty on the part of Timberlake Wertenbaker. In the late eighteenth century the director's duties were shared between the leading actor, playwright, prompter and the theatre managers.

costume design by Julian McGowan
THE MAJOR PLAYERS
AS REFERRED TO IN

DAVID GARRICK (1717 - 1779)

Sideway: I saw Mr Garrick being melancholy once...Hamlet it was

David Garrick is probably the most notorious and influential of all the eighteenth century actors. The Manager of Drury Lane Theatre from 1747 to 1776, he established a ‘natural’ style of acting. This was not what we would understand as naturalistic, but his portrayal of emotions was less formal than before, and he was able to bring out comedy in tragedy and vice versa.

CHARLES MACKLIN (1699 - 1797)

Phillip: I never liked Garrick, I always preferred Macklin.

Macklin was the first actor to perform Shylock as a tragic, rather than a comic character. He founded a ‘school’ of realism, and encouraged actors first to speak the lines as they would in everyday life and then exaggerate and project them for the stage.

JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE (1757 - 1823)

In 1788 Kemble became the Manager of Drury Lane. His style was essentially classical, distinguished by... the severe grandeur, and the majestic simplicity which characterised the fine art of the classical ages.
PEG WOFFINGTON (1714 - 1760)

Sideway: lovely Peg Woffington...
She was so pale -

The Marilyn Monroe of the eighteenth century stage. She became famous for her portrayal of Sir Harry Widdair in *The Constant Couple*. It was a 'breeches' role of her own making.

Margaret (Peg) Woffington, oil on canvas, artist unknown, Jones Bequest, Theatre Museum

SARAH SIDDONS (1755 - 1831)

Sideway: I see ladies approaching; our future... Siddons

Sarah Siddons overcame the presumption that every actress was a whore; in 1789, she became the female symbol of the nation Britannia - at a service in St Pauls to celebrate the recovery of George III from his first bout of madness.

Collins: I'm a Kemble man myself
Eighteenth Century Theatre

_The Recruiting Officer_ was first performed in 1706 at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and ran for eight nights. Farquhar died the following year. However, over the next 20 years the play enjoyed 124 performances which is testimony to its incredible success.

How would the acting styles have differed between performances given in a ‘site specific’ location, such as a barn, and a theatre such as Drury Lane?

The Drury Lane Theatre which Sideway visited was the second Drury Lane, designed by Christopher Wren and seating 2,000 people.

How would you envisage the performance space for the convicts’ production of _The Recruiting Officer_? How do you imagine their production might have been staged in terms of set, lighting, costume and make-up?

Describe your ideas.

During the eighteenth century, there was a strong tradition of “strolling players” who would give “site specific” performances in locations such as barns.