

imitating the dog:

Three Worlds: Understanding Theatrical Form in ITD's Work

A framework for analysing how performance style shapes meaning

Introduction

imitating the dog's productions rarely exist in a single theatrical register. A scene might open in a mode that feels naturalistic and psychologically grounded, then shift into something more heightened and symbolic, then break open entirely as a performer steps forward and speaks directly to the audience. These are not random shifts; they are deliberate formal choices, and understanding why they happen is one of the keys to understanding how ITD makes meaning.

The Three Worlds framework is a tool for thinking clearly about these different theatrical registers: what they are, how they work, and what they communicate. It was developed by Andrew Quick and Pete Brooks through their work teaching devising and directing at university level, and has informed both ITD's thinking about staging and their approach to discussing theatre with students and practitioners.

It is important to be clear about what this framework is and is not. It is not a description of how ITD currently makes work. ITD's current process is script-led and fully designed before rehearsals begin; the "three worlds" are not stages in a rehearsal process. The framework is an analytical tool: a vocabulary for reading the formal choices in a piece of theatre and understanding what those choices do for an audience.

Used in that way, the Three Worlds framework is directly relevant to the written and analytical components of A Level & BTEC Drama and Theatre. It gives students a precise, shared vocabulary for describing and interpreting theatrical form: vocabulary that maps onto the assessment objectives across OCR, Edexcel and Eduqas specifications. However, it may also prove useful for higher level GCSE Students, or for those devising as part of undergraduate modules at university.

The document is structured as follows: a definition and overview of each of the three worlds, with specific reference to ITD's productions; an analysis of how ITD combines worlds within a single production; and practical exercises that explore each world in action. The exercises are designed to be used alongside – not instead of – reading and watching ITD's work. They work best after students have engaged with the essay "Screens, Bodies and Stories" and have seen or watched recordings of at least one ITD production.



All Blood Runs Red (2025)

The Three Worlds: Definitions

Every piece of theatre operates within one or more of three broad theatrical registers. These are not rigid categories – real productions move between them and combine them – but they provide a useful framework for analysing what a particular scene or staging choice is doing.

The Realist World

In the Realist World, the production attempts to create a believable version of everyday life. Characters are psychologically motivated and feel like real people. Settings resemble the outside world. The audience watches through an invisible "fourth wall", observing private behaviour as if unseen. Action develops through cause and effect. Behaviour is socially and psychologically grounded, and performance attempts to reproduce the rhythms and details of ordinary life.

The theatrical machinery – lighting rigs, sound systems, scene changes – is concealed. The goal is to make the audience forget they are in a theatre.

In ITD's work: Elements of the Realist World appear in ITD's productions primarily in the behaviour of individual performers – the psychological specificity of a character's response to an event, the detailed physical life of a scene. But ITD rarely operates in a purely realist mode: the presence of live cameras and projected screens makes it impossible to fully sustain the fourth wall. When ITD uses elements of realism, it is often to create a baseline from which the other worlds can depart.

Key features: fourth wall, psychologically motivated characters, chronological time, naturalistic speech and movement, realistic sound and lighting, hidden theatrical machinery.



Macbeth (2023)

The Metaphorical World

In the Metaphorical World, the production moves away from realism into a heightened, symbolic, dream-like, or poetic register. Meaning is made through imagery, atmosphere, repetition, and symbolic gesture rather than through psychological realism and cause-and-effect narrative. Time may be fragmented or non-linear. Characters may be more archetypal than individual. The body of the performer – their physical presence, their movement – becomes as significant as what they say.

The Metaphorical World draws on the languages of film (dream sequences, slow motion, montage, memory sequences), dance, physical theatre, and visual art. It aims not to reproduce reality but to find a formal equivalent for interior states: what grief, desire or terror feel like from the inside.

In ITD's work: The Metaphorical World is present in ITD's productions most clearly in the projection and camera work, or during choreographed movement sequences, as in *Frankenstein*. When the screen shows something that couldn't literally be happening – a memory, a hallucination, a symbolic image – the production has entered the Metaphorical World. In *War of the Worlds*, the protagonist's hallucinatory version of the alien invasion is constructed in a metaphorical register: heightened, distorted, emotionally true but literally impossible. In *The Zero Hour*, the animated backgrounds of a digitally reimagined Berlin create a metaphorical space rather than a realistic one. In *Macbeth*, the witches' camera work frequently captures the inner states of the Macbeths in ways that feel more like metaphorical expression than documentary footage.

Key features: symbolic imagery, stylised movement, fragmented time, poetic or non-naturalistic language, atmospheric sound and lighting, dream logic, repetition and ritual.



Frankenstein (2024)

The Presentational World

In the Presentational World, the production openly acknowledges the audience and exposes the performance as a constructed event. Performers may speak directly to the audience, step in and out of role, expose the theatrical machinery, or comment on the action as it unfolds. Performance exists in the "here and now" rather than within a closed fictional illusion. The audience's awareness that they are watching a piece of theatre is not concealed; it is the subject of the work

The Presentational World is associated with Brecht's techniques of direct address and *Verfremdungseffekt*, but it is broader than that. It includes documentary and essay theatre, stand-up and cabaret traditions, and any performance mode in which the performer acknowledges their own presence as a performer rather than disappearing into a character.

In ITD's work: The Presentational World is most visible in the moments when ITD's productions directly acknowledge their own construction. In *Macbeth*, the witches address the audience directly, explaining the adaptation's choices and commenting on the action. In *War of the Worlds*, the camera crews and their equipment are visible throughout, constantly reminding the audience that what they are watching is being made in front of them. This visibility is the Presentational World in action: ITD is not trying to sustain an illusion but to make the process of construction part of the audience's experience. Andrew Quick's essay on screens and technology describes this as "exposing the mechanism", a Brechtian choice that invites the audience to think critically about what they are watching rather than simply being absorbed by it.

Key features: direct address, visible theatrical machinery, performers acknowledging their own performance, commentary and critique, exposed technical processes, functional use of sound and lighting.



War of the Worlds (2026)

How ITD Combines the Three Worlds

ITD's most distinctive formal feature is the way it moves between worlds within a single production and the way it uses different theatrical registers to carry different kinds of meaning simultaneously.

A useful way to see this is to think about the relationship between the live performance and the screen in any ITD production. The live performer exists primarily in the Realist World; they are a body, a presence, a specific person doing specific things. The projected screen image can move between all three worlds: it can show a realistic close-up of the performer's face (Realist), a symbolic or metaphorical image that represents their inner state (Metaphorical), or footage that makes the act of filming visible and explicit (Presentational). In a single production, the screen might occupy all three registers at different moments, and the movement between them is where much of the meaning is made.

Students analysing ITD's work should always ask: which world is this moment in? And if two worlds are operating simultaneously – as they often are – what is the relationship between them? What does the tension or contrast between the worlds tell us about the production's argument?

Example – *Macbeth* (2023): The live performers operate primarily in the Realist World – the Macbeths are psychologically motivated characters with interior lives. The witches move between the Metaphorical World (as agents of fate and supernatural force) and the Presentational World (as camera operators who directly acknowledge the audience and comment on the action). The projected screen footage moves between Realist (close-ups that feel like documentary evidence of what is happening) and Metaphorical (images that express the inner states of the Macbeths in ways the live performance cannot). The production never settles in a single world, and that instability is part of how it creates its distinctive effect.



Macbeth (2023): the witches operating cameras

Example – *War of the Worlds* (2026): Will Travers's experience is staged primarily in the Metaphorical World; his hallucinatory version of events is symbolic, distorted, emotionally true but literally impossible. The hospital reality that contains him operates in the Realist World. The moments when the camera crews and their equipment become visible – when the production exposes its own construction – are Presentational. The political argument of the production depends on all three worlds being legible simultaneously: Will's ideology is shown as a constructed fiction (Presentational), felt as an emotional reality (Realist), and expressed as a kind of fever dream (Metaphorical).



War of the Worlds (2026)

The Three Worlds and the A Level Specifications

The Three Worlds framework maps directly onto the analytical vocabulary required by all three major A Level Drama and Theatre specifications.

OCR requires students to demonstrate understanding of "the conventions used in drama and theatre" and to make "connections between theory and practice". The Three Worlds framework provides exactly that: a conceptual model of theatrical conventions that students can apply both to ITD's work and to their own devised practice.

Edexcel requires students to understand "theatrical style and use of conventions" and "how meaning is conveyed" through staging choices. Identifying which world a scene operates in, and why, is a direct application of these requirements.

Eduqas requires students to demonstrate knowledge of "theatrical style and conventions" and to understand how their chosen practitioner "realises their artistic intention". The Three Worlds framework gives students a precise way to describe ITD's formal choices and explain the artistic intention behind them.

Practical Exercises

The following exercises explore each of the three worlds practically. They are designed to follow, rather than replace, close analysis of ITD's productions. Students should be able to connect what they discover in each exercise to specific moments in at least one ITD production.

All exercises use the same basic scenario – a dinner party or family gathering – to enable direct comparison between the three worlds. If a different scenario is more relevant to the source material students are working with, it can be substituted throughout.

Part 1: The Realist World

Exercise 1: Create a Realist Scene

ITD connection: The psychological specificity of performance in ITD's work – particularly the behaviour of the central characters in *Macbeth* and *War of the Worlds* – draws on the conventions of the Realist World even within a production that is never fully realist. Understanding realism is the starting point for understanding how and why ITD departs from it.

Aim: To explore psychological realism through believable relationships, social tension, and motivated behaviour.

Create a dinner party or family gathering scene. Focus on:

- Believable dialogue that sounds like real speech
- Naturalistic behaviour – detailed everyday actions, serving food, pouring drinks, awkward silences
- Psychological motivation – each character has a reason for being there and a reason for what they do
- Social subtext – what is not being said is as important as what is
- The fourth wall – the audience should feel as though they are observing private behaviour

As the scene develops, introduce a dramatic tension: a secret emerging, a relationship breaking down, a political disagreement escalating, unexpected news.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- What made the scene believable?
- How did status and relationships emerge without being stated directly?
- How did realistic detail affect the audience's engagement?
- In which ITD productions can you identify moments that operate in the Realist World?

Exercise 2: Space and Relationship

Aim: To explore how physical space in the Realist World reflects emotional and social relationships.

Create a still image of the same gathering. Consider:

- Distance between people – who is close, who is distant, and why?
- Eye contact – who looks at whom, and who avoids whose gaze?
- Ownership of space – who commands the room and who exists at its margins?
- Body language and posture

Slowly bring the image to life using realistic interaction. Then ask: does the physical arrangement of the space tell the same story as the dialogue, or a different one?

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- How did space communicate relationships before a word was spoken?
- What would a camera close-up reveal that the live image couldn't?

Part 2: The Metaphorical World

Exercise 3: Ritual and Systems

ITD connection: In *Macbeth*, the witches' scenes operate in a heightened, ritualised register that is distinct from the psychological realism of the Macbeths' interior scenes. The projected imagery frequently moves into the Metaphorical World, finding symbolic equivalents for states of mind that the Realist World could only describe. In *War of the Worlds*, the protagonist's hallucinatory version of events is constructed through the formal vocabulary of the Metaphorical World.
Aim: To explore symbolic and ritualised performance, and to discover what the Metaphorical World can do that the Realist World cannot.

Using the same dinner party scenario, create a stylised sequence that does not aim for realism. Instead:

- Exaggerate gestures until they become symbolic rather than naturalistic
- Choreograph actions into repeated movement patterns
- Use rhythm and physical sequences – eating, pouring, passing dishes – as a formal structure
- Allow the ritual to carry the weight that dialogue would carry in a realist scene

You may include: repeated phrases or fragments of speech, slow motion, physical theatre, stylised gesture, fragments of music or sound.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- When did the scene stop feeling realistic? What changed?
- What emotions or ideas emerged from repetition and stylisation that couldn't emerge from realism?
- How does this compare to moments in ITD's productions where the staging becomes heightened or symbolic?

Exercise 4: Breaking the System

Aim: To explore how the Metaphorical World handles disruption, transformation, and the collapse of social order: states that the Realist World can describe but not embody.
Once the ritual from Exercise 3 is established, introduce a disruptive force into it:

- Grief, fear, or sudden violence
- A secret exposed that can't be contained within the ritual

- Someone trying to leave or escape
- A political or emotional confrontation that the formal structure can't absorb

Allow the repeated gestures and systems to mutate under pressure. Experiment with distorted movement, soundscapes, repeated dialogue fragments, music loops, altered time.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):
- How did the disruption of the ritual create meaning?
- How did time feel different from the Realist World?
- Did the scene become dream-like or nightmarish? What caused that shift?
- In *War of the Worlds*, the protagonist's constructed world "falls apart" as his consciousness fails. How does this exercise illuminate that structural choice?

Already tried 'Setting and Breaking a Rule' (Exercise 1) in The Rules of the Game? That exercise approaches the same territory through a rule you define yourself — narrative, camera, sound or design — rather than through ritual.

Exercise 5: Memory Montage
Aim: To explore non-linear time and cinematic influence in the Metaphorical World: the fragmented, associative logic of memory rather than the chronological logic of realism

Create a sequence based around fragments of memory from the dinner party scenario. Use:
- Repeated images from different angles or with different emotional inflections
- Fragmented dialogue – phrases that repeat, interrupt, or contradict each other
- Movement motifs that return and transform
- Overlapping action, slow motion, sudden transitions

The sequence should feel like memories colliding rather than a story being told.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):
- How did montage shape meaning differently from cause-and-effect narrative?
- Did the audience experience emotion differently from the Realist World exercises?
- ITD's *A Farewell to Arms* used projection to layer a physical space with accumulated memory and association. How does this exercise illuminate that choice?

Part 3: The Presentational World

Exercise 6: Presenting the Scene

ITD connection: The Presentational World is where ITD's productions are most explicitly Brechtian, where the construction is exposed, the audience is directly addressed, and the fiction is acknowledged as a fiction. The witches in *Macbeth*, the camera crews in *The Zero Hour*, and the visible editing and filming apparatus in *War of the Worlds* all operate in the Presentational World.

Aim: To explore direct address, visible construction, and the Presentational World's relationship with the audience.

Using the dinner party as your starting point, create a ten-minute presentation for the class. You must not simply perform the dinner realistically. Instead, communicate the essence, tension, or meaning of the event through a sequence of materials. You may:

- Perform moments from the scene, then step out and comment on them
- Narrate events rather than enacting them
- Replay scenes differently – showing what the characters might have said, what they wanted to say, what they didn't say
- Expose scene changes and theatrical process rather than concealing them
- Bring objects, images, or sounds from outside the fiction

The "machinery" of the piece should remain visible. Think of the performance as a collage of scenes, commentary, movement, film references, personal response, and narration.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- How did acknowledging the audience change the performance?
- What did visibility – of the theatrical process, of the performers' own presence – add?
- What is the political implication of refusing to sustain an illusion?
- How does this connect to what ITD does when it makes the camera and crew visible on stage?

Exercise 7: Performer and Character

Aim: To explore the Presentational World's relationship with personal experience and authentic presence: the moment when the performer's own voice becomes part of the work.



Students tell a true story connected to a family meal, celebration, or social gathering. During the telling, they may step into scenes, play different characters, interrupt themselves, comment on their own memories, or replay moments differently. The performance should move fluidly between narration and enactment.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- When did the performer seem most present – most "themselves"?
- How did switching between narration and character affect the audience?
- In ITD's work, performers often move between being characters in the story and visible technicians who operate the cameras. How does that movement relate to what you discovered in this exercise?

The Final Comparative Project: One Scenario, Three Worlds

Aim: To understand that theatrical form is never neutral. Every formal choice – which world a scene operates in, how worlds are combined, when a production shifts from one register to another – shapes how an audience experiences meaning. This exercise draws together all the practical work above.

Groups are given the same basic scenario. Suggested options:

- A family dinner after a funeral
- A birthday celebration that goes wrong
- A reunion meal between people who have been estranged
- A political argument at dinner that reveals deeper fractures
- A final meal before somebody leaves, possibly forever

Groups create the scenario three times: once as a Realist scene, once as a Metaphorical performance, and once as a Presentational piece.

Reflection questions (for portfolios and written work):

- How did the audience's relationship to the scenario change across the three versions?
- How did time and space function differently in each version?
- Which version created the strongest emotional response? Which created the strongest intellectual or critical response?
- ITD's productions combine all three worlds simultaneously. Having worked in each separately, what new understanding of ITD's work does this give you?
- Which moment in a specific ITD production can you now describe more precisely using the Three Worlds framework?

Assessment objective: All boards: analysis of theatrical style, conventions, and form; artistic intention; how staging choices convey meaning to an audience. OCR AO1 portfolio (connections between theory and practice); Edexcel: understanding of practitioner methodology applied to devised and text-based work.

Key Terms

Brechtian: Relating to the methods of German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), who wanted audiences to think critically rather than simply becoming absorbed in a story. Brecht made the construction of theatre visible, reminding audiences that they were watching something made, with a point of view. ITD's work shares this concern with exposing the mechanism.

Verfremdungseffekt: German for 'alienation effect' or 'distancing effect': Brecht's term for techniques that stop an audience losing themselves in the illusion of a story, reminding them instead that they are watching a construction. Direct address, visible stagehands, and performers stepping out of character are all Verfremdungseffekt techniques ITD draw on in the Presentational World.

Fourth wall: The imaginary boundary between performers and audience in naturalistic theatre, through which the audience observes the action as if unseen. "Breaking the fourth wall" means a performer acknowledges the audience directly — something ITD's productions do routinely in the Presentational World.

Montage: A film editing technique that assembles a sequence from multiple short, often disconnected images or fragments to create a cumulative meaning or emotional effect, rather than showing continuous, real-time action. ITD draw on montage in the Metaphorical World, particularly in memory or dream sequences.

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For how these exercises link to GCSE, A Level and university specifications, see Curriculum Connections (Section 4).

Photography of *Macbeth, Frankenstein, All Blood Runs Red and War of the Worlds:* Ed Waring.