INTRODUCTION

For many years, I used the word organic *when speaking about acting: to work organically, to perform organically, to bring about an organic human being. To me it meant creating something alive and from within, as opposed to leaping at illustrations of something preconceived. Webster defines the word as "pertaining to or derived from living organisms; exhibiting characteristics belonging to human organisms." Since the advent of an awareness of ecology, the word has taken on added emphasis as applied to farming and gardening. In this sense, it means to make use of nature's own gifts and habits by learning them, understanding them, and putting them to use without adding anything synthetic, chemical or artificial. I love the idea that whether I make a rose or a role grow big and healthy I must do it organically.*

In the next seven chapters, I am proposing the various stages of work on a role, all of the areas we must explore before arriving at the final selection of actions for the specific character. I want to emphasize that the working steps must be flexible. Even though you want a degree of order and logic in developing your character, don't box yourself in or rely on

"rules." Don't look for labels or assume that each chapter can be filed away or considered "done!" until you can fuse them all into a living role. Creativity—based on freedom, and freedom based on responsibility, as in life—does not follow a rigid formula.

Chapters 21 through 27 embrace, I hope, all the areas you should examine to unearth the character. They will overlap. In the working process, one may precede another. But whatever you begin with, wherever you put the emphasis, the work must lead you to the action, to the spontaneous doing, giving body and substance to the playwright's and the director's dream, and convincing the audience that this dream is lucid and real.

The masterful technique of a genius consciously *employs these areas of work only when the intuition fails and he doesn't know what to do next. Great actors have accumulated the substance of these chapters, almost subconsciously, but we must learn these techniques and begin our work with a kind of blueprint based on them. When we use the blueprint well, the tracings will not show in the final architecture. Our structure must stand free and be ready to be lived in.*

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FIRST CONTACT WITH THE PLAY

WHEN an actor first reads the play on which he is going to work, he is an audience. He visualizes the play and hears it like an audience. Whatever identification he may have with the play is similar to the identification an audience might have, and should not be confused with the organic identification he must find with the character he is going to play. He laughs at or with the play, he cries at or with the play, and, more than anything else, he cries and laughs at or with the character he is going to play. This is a normal reaction. At this point, he *is* the audience. He is still on the other side of the footlights; he is not yet on stage. This is why the images he conceives, and the tones and sounds he hears in his imagination on his first contact with the play must soon be discarded and not confused with the real work on the play and the part. The actor still has to go backstage and then evolve on stage.

Whenever I retained my first images or used them as guidance for my character I was in big trouble. However, when I worked subjectively through the play from its roots—to discover who "I" am, what "I" want, what "I" do—I ended

up with something quite different, with deeper human meaning and no ready-made clichés. Jumping for the illustration of the first image is almost an automatic trap for the inexperienced actor. It may even manifest itself in something as obvious as crying at the moment when he feels sorry for the character, though the character himself wouldn't shed a tear. The actor is providing the tears that eventually should be in the eyes of the audience. It doesn't necessarily mean that the character is moved. The character is in action, struggling.

With this in mind, read the play once. And then again and again. This may seem self-evident and naïve, but I can point to many examples where a sloppy actor "just loved" a scene he was observing in class and wanted to know "What's it from?" He had to be told it was from the same play from which he'd done a different scene only the week before!

Ask yourself what the playwright wants to communicate. Define it in an active sentence. Whether or not your definition is correct will finally be the director's decision or an agreement between the two of you. However, you should grasp this approach so that when the director shapes a production thematically in order to further the playwright's intention, you will be able to respond correctly and understand that he is asking you to help him execute this theme.

A play like *A Streetcar Named Desire* might be interpreted as a plea for the sensitive: the problem of a hypersensitive romantic victim of a brutal society. It may ask the audience for compassion for its victim. In this interpretation, Blanche would be the protagonist of the play; Stanley the antagonist; Stella fluctuating and caught between; Mitch, beginning by joining with the protagonist, but ending up against her; the poker players siding with the antagonist; the newsboy with the protagonist; and the neighbors caught between. You would immediately have "sides" for and against, consequently the rudiments of necessary basic rela-

tionships of the characters—not only to the play but to each other. In fact, the play *was* produced with this theme.

The play has *also* been produced as a plea for a down-to-earth, rational life by a director who envisioned a healthy, animal society represented by Stella and Stanley and their friends. Into this society a highly destructive and neurotic Blanche enters from a sick world of the past to destroy this functioning society, undermining the very fiber of Stella's and Stanley's lives. Consequently, the relationships of the characters to the play and to each other become diametrically opposed.

It should become obvious that in order for the individual actor to make a meaningful contribution to the play—to bring about a character to serve this play—he must learn to make considerations about the play itself before he begins to "interpret" or make a layout for his own role willfully, at random, or simply to serve his own ego.

A side effect and a danger of studio work (where the actor is learning to study parts with a teacher whose function must be to teach him how to work on parts, to make him real in the execution of parts, but *not to direct* him in his parts) is that the actor may get into the habit of "interpreting" alone, so that when he *does* work with a director he feels intruded upon. He may then feel that the director is putting his finger into his "creation," actually interfering with the actor's creative process. This is a terrible misunderstanding. A correctly trained actor should not only need and want a director to help him, to lead him into and through the play up to the final editing and selection of action, but should have at his fingertips a technique so flexible that he can justify almost any direction he is given, and execute it in terms of his personal realities. He should be able to do the internal work which will bring about the externals demanded by the director. The acquisition of a good technique should make it

possible to execute anything. The responsibility lies in the execution.

My first year as a teacher consisted of my mistakenly "helping" the actor by giving him a directorial score rather than dealing with his technical problems as an actor. After his scene had been interpreted and directed for him, the actor not only felt better, but looked better to his colleagues —but only for that scene! At the end of the semester he had the identical difficulties with which he'd begun. His execution of a scene was dependent on *my* technique instead of on the development of his own.

In the continued examination of the play there is a mixture of objective and subjective research. The objective ought to consist of about ten percent and the subjective the other ninety percent. Whatever intellectual work takes place *at any stage of the game* should serve to stimulate the creative imagination but *not* make for an essay or master's thesis on the play or the character.

After examining possible themes for the play and deciding on your answer to "What does the play want?" (which should give you a sense of where you are going), examine the events of the play in terms of time and place and human needs and conflicts. If you are sensitive, you will also get an impression of the texture of the play, and this should free your intuitions about it and your role. The play might be earthy, robust, like sienna, like a field of yellow hay, like Mahler, etc. Or it might be like clear water, sparkly, with sharp, icy particles, or a translucent blue, like Mozart, etc. These descriptions are meaningful to me. They help me to select personal actions. If you find similar things which stimulate you, make use of them. But don't discuss them. Don't get mystical or general about them. Everything you explore should eventually lead you to real walking, talking, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching—and feeling!

I like to make notes on the play. If anyone else read them they wouldn't have the vaguest idea what the notes meant. My notes are highly personal and have to do with my own life experiences, things which might be useful as anchors or substitutions for identification with my character and relationships. My notes also have to do with my state of being at various times in my life which might relate to the events of the play. I make my notes at random as things occur to me. Some of them I extend and others I forget. I continuously make new notes.

Having explored this area for better or worse, I will now move on to the next real question: Who am I in this play?

The specialized vocabulary we use to describe technical problems in acting has endless interpretations—sometimes opposing ones—so many that I'd like to resort to one of my favorite handbooks on acting: the dictionary! I have selected the definitions given by Mr. Webster which best help me to describe what I *mean* by them. For example, under the noun "Play" only the ninth definition states, "A dramatic composition or performance." I like the first and second even better.
1. "The action, motion, especially when free, rapid or light."
2. "Freedom or scope for motion or action." I will begin the following chapters with Webster's definitions, and star (*) my preferences.

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THE CHARACTER

char'ac·ter 1. a distinctive mark, trait, quality or attribute. *5. the aggregate of distinctive qualities belonging to an individual impressed by nature, education or habit. *6. essential quality, nature; kind. *7. an individual's pattern of behavior or personality, moral constitution. 9. reputation. 15. person in a play, story, novel, etc.

Oh . . . to *be* Hamlet! Ahhh . . . to *be* Juliet! To be St. Joan, or Eliza Doolittle, or 'Enry 'Iggins for the few hours allotted by the playwright! If you really want to *be,* you'd better know who you are when the play begins, and how you got to be that way!

The cliché image from the first reading of the play still dangles in front of me. I still see "her" running into her lover's arms, or retreating shyly into a corner of the room. I can hear "her" melodious voice with the slight regional accent, and I am yearning to try those poetic moments from the second act out loud, to get on my feet in my own living room and imitate my vision of "her." It's a dangerous lure.

When I confront the character I'm going to play, I must ask myself, "Who am *I*?"

I must begin organically by finding a change of address and a new autobiography. If I ask myself, "Who is *she*?" and "Where was *she* born?" I might end up with a brilliant treatise on someone possibly more removed from me than when I began. Rather than closing the gap between myself and the character, I may have created an abyss. The difference between the "she" and the "I" is crucial. Dublin 1865, for "her" is a convenient and easily dismissed fact. If, however, my first question is where and when was "I" born, and the answer in the play is Dublin, 1865, the answer becomes loaded with new questions for which I must find answers and substitutions, using my imagination to make them *serviceable* facts.

My aim is to give myself new roots, to make all of the elements of "my" life up to the play's beginning as concrete as I can, until I know as much as possible about the new "me" and more than "she" knows about herself. I must even investigate "my" subconscious needs and the things I don't want to face about "myself." I must glean (from intensive study of the play) facts about parents, upbringing and education, health, friends, skills and interests. I should not only begin to weigh what "I" say and do (and why), but also what others say about "me," and how they respond to me, what these things reveal about "my" main drives as a human being, what "I" want as well as what "I" don't want. Later, all of this must feed and fill what I contact inwardly, as well as what I actually see and hear, and whatever may move in on me. This should make me understand what I do, and why I must do it. And it should give me the faith that "I" *am!*

A scoffing actor asked, "Why in the world do you have to know who your grandmother is?" I answered, "It can't hurt; it might help!" As someone once said (God help me if I remember who it was. I hope it was me!), "All tedious research is worth one inspired moment."

In order to construct a new life up to the time when the play begins, use imaginative identification with all the facts you can sift out of the play by substitution or by using the magic "If I . . ."

When I worked on the part of Georgie Elgin in Clifford Odets' *The Country Girl,* I devoured the play for any light it could shed on "my" background. I—Georgie—was born in Hartford, Connecticut, about thirty years ago into a middle-class society. My parents, with airs, gave me an education in private schools. The play tells me that my mother was socially ambitious, gardened for a hobby, was unaffectionate, and that I consciously rejected all the things she thought important. My father was a prominent performer, a magician. He seemed illusive to me—away from home on tours much of the time. I admired him and his need for freedom from a narrow, conventional life. At an early age, I married a known actor who was considerably older than I. The marriage seemed to be good for a short time. Then my husband's enjoyment of alcohol became a disease. We had a child who died young. The death gave him another excuse for drinking and brought him and me near skid row. His dependence on me grew, and so I stuck by him. I have no friends, have isolated myself more and more from others. I find an outlet in books. These are some of the things I can discover about my past life from the play itself.

Before these facts can be really useful to me I have to round them out with an imaginative question-and-answer game. Wherever I can draw on my own experience to meet those of Georgie I will do so. If my own life strongly differs in any area, I'll borrow from observation or make substitutions. I want this past to have such a reality that even my reflexes on stage will be those of "me"—Georgie Elgin.

Georgie's mother has no connection with my own, so I try the next best thing and use the mother of an early schoolmate

who fills the bill. She was a woman with silvery hair set in artificial waves, with orange-lacquered nails and a passion for bridge. I remember identifying with my friend (her daughter) as she was dismissed, pushed aside, and made into a convenient "sweet thing." I enlarge my imagined life with her into daily events of coming home from school, having dinner, preparing for bedtime, etc.

I can make a more direct transference of my father to Georgie's father. I use a direct image of my own father, his enormous work concentration and freedom and aloneness in that work, and I change his work from writing to magic tricks. I must now mate him with my new mother. I use how I put him on a pedestal, how I treasured our few moments alone when he shared his work with me, how we escaped together from that mother. By combining real and imagined people and incidents, I am laying a groundwork for my new character.

Madison, Wisconsin, where I grew up can be transferred to Hartford, Connecticut—even the school, the church, the country club, and aspects of my own home. I also visited Hartford, so my faith in the transference is strong. From her vocabulary, her choice of expressions, as well as the playwright's statement, I know that Georgie is a bookworm. I recall my own need to barricade myself with Shaw and Chekhov to get away from my prom and sorority acquaintances, and now use Georgie's Whitman, the Brontes, and Jane Austen instead. I continue to build my early life, and consider its consequence on my present one.

Did the seeming illusiveness of "my" father, and my love for him make me fall in love with an older man, a man who was also a performer? Did "my" mother's ambition for a certain kind of social status make me rebel and see only its falseness? I become aware that "my" refuge in books still sustains me in my present sordid life.

I am bound to meet up with problem areas in which these kinds of substitutions are not easily available. One such problem area is the complexity of my relationship to my husband, Frank. *Exactly* what attracted me about him? What was the nature of our courtship? Was I immediately aware of his great talent, not just seduced by his fame? Did it make me feel stronger to hold him up after drinking bouts? Did I, perhaps, have a baby to give him a greater sense of responsibility? How often have I tried to break away from him, and what did he have to do each time to seduce me into staying? Was the relationship sexually powerful at first? When did I become aware that he lied and cheated to win me around, and that his lying worked on me like one of my father's magic tricks? When did his drinking and inability to hold a job become the intolerable burden on me that exists as the play opens? What made me accept and enjoy the first drinks with him? Were they a part of my intoxication with him as a man and an artist? Did they enhance my sexual intoxication with him? When, what and where was the turning point which turned the enjoyment into an aversion? What incidents helped me to shape a main objective and character drive of putting up a death battle to hold onto my personal integrity and sense of dignity?

The *answers* I must give to these kinds of questions are consequential only to me. Each actress who tackles the part of Georgie will find different answers and make her own substitutions.

Other problem areas will arise. What do I use for the loss of the child? How much of the loss is alive in "me" now? What do "I" blame for it? Myself? How do "I" relate to extreme poverty? (I experienced it for only a few months in my personal life, but it's still very usable.) I find that Frank Elgin claims "I" was a former Miss America. It puzzles me in relationship to the rest of Georgie's character. Would she

ever have been a contestant? Then I realize that Frank has invented this about "me," along with many other lies.

I can examine some of Georgie's characteristic habits now or save them for a later stage of the work. If I ask myself why "I" chew gum all the time, why I have such an aversion to tobacco, why I burn incense in every room wherever I go, I might not find an answer until I had realized that one of my character objectives is cleanliness. "I" chew gum for a clean taste in my mouth. Tobacco is a dirty habit. It stains the fingers and teeth, and fouls the breath. (I might tie it in with Frank's drinking, which I fear as a habit-forming drug.) The incense covers musty odors of tenement rooms, as well as "the restaurant odors downstairs," and sweaty dressing-room smells, the smell of stale liquor.

"My" aversion to Frank's need to be liked and his consequent fawning and hypocrisy is the clue to my created counter-characteristic of stoic directness—*no* buttering up or overingratiating manners.

Every actor should explore similar questions about his role. He should find the questions in the play and solve them for himself with identification. Whether he uses real or imaginary experiences, or both, is unimportant as long as he can believe in them and tap them when he needs them.

This question-and-answer game continues until all possibilities for it are exhausted. To bring about a new me, with new but solid roots, need not be discussed with the playwright, the director, or with fellow actors. It is secret laboratory work, and must stay secret. It is *essential* homework.

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CIRCUMSTANCES

cir·cum·stance *1. A condition, fact or event determining the occurrence of another fact or event. *2. An essential condition, a primary qualification of a fact or event, an accessory condition. *3. The conditions environing and affecting a person or agent. *4. Accompanying or surrounding detail, especially fullness of detail.

The circumstances given by the author of the play must be dug out of each word he has set down. They can determine or condition our conflicts, can supply our motivations, and specify the nature of our actions. They are rarely dealt with sufficiently. The imagination of the actor can't really begin to work until he has found them, filled them in, rounded them out, and extended them fully. Because of the object-exercises work on the *immediately* preceding circumstances of an event, the conditions of the *present* which surround the event and the expectations of the circumstances for the immediate *future* should be a familiar area of exploration (and work), and hopefully, defining circumstances is already an established work habit. As applied to a play, the obligation to find everything given you by the author in the

stage directions about time and place, as well as in the dialogue of the play or hidden underneath the words of the characters, becomes larger and more difficult. Substituting and particularizing is inherent in every aspect of the work. You have to find not just *what* happens, but under what circumstances it happens; what circumstances surround "your" life at home, at work, at leisure, in love and war, what is the state of "your" health and mind before you enter the scene. This will make for an understanding of the immediate circumstances and the influence on the actual events and their inevitability. Circumstances which *change* during the course of the scene must also be taken into consideration as they might make for a change of the objective, and condition the actions (i.e., something burns on the stove while you are serving cocktails to your guests; during an argument with your roommate you are informed that a bill collector is waiting in the next room; during a passionate love scene a storm comes to an end, or a burglar alarm goes off!

The search for past and immediate circumstances has to be made, not only for the beginning of the play but for "your" life during and *between* every act and every scene, unless the action on stage is continuous.

TIME, for the actor, is not just the bluntly stated stage direction of "8 P.M." PLACE means infinitely more than "The drawing room." WHEN and WHERE encompass many elements which the untrained actor often sluffs off or answers superficially. Even extensive notes, considered only factually, will bring about a kind of dry, unusable objectivity. Learning to explore and assess time and place subjectively, making total use of them for the benefit of the role, searching for all of their aspects through the soul and the senses of the new "me" to help bring about a chain of actions is a matter of tenacious, prolonged practice.

When do "I" live? In what century, year, season of that

year, month of the season, week, day, hour, and finally what minute leads me into my first action? These questions must encompass everything *implied* by the century in which "I" live, from the cradle to the grave. The consequences of everything implied by the time are the material out of which I will build "my" life.

What are "my" social concepts, government and laws, religion, fashions, appetites and tastes which come from that time to condition "my" life? Where does something coming from the given year affect me? How does the season influence me? What does the day itself do to me? What is at stake for me in the minute of the day in which my life begins actively to evolve? The more detailed my questions, the more I can hunt for consequent actions and animate them as if they had never been done before. The more I find subjective identification, the more I will believe that "I" am alive in that time. The more sources I have to draw on, the more intuitive "my" responses will be.

Another big question which must be broken down into specifics is, How *much* time do "I" have? Is there time to fulfill my wishes, possibly even to live (if I know I'm dying or in great danger)? Is there time to finish "my" work, to prepare for visitors, to get to bed, to go to the bathroom? *Time* is an active influence on even our smallest daily tasks. Since conflict is at the root of drama (whether comedic or tragic), the playwright often presents us with time pressures, and we must learn to make exact use of them. "I've got time to kill," might also be a force for determining the kind of action.

"*Where* do 'I' live?" is just as large a question as "When?" Before I explore the room where the action takes place, I have to ask in what country, city, village, neighborhood and house "I" live. And I must delve into "my" relationship to all of them. A young man or woman raised in a small New

England village will have been influenced by totally different things from those if he or she had grown up on a sprawling ranch in the far west, or in the slums, or in the elegant section of a large city. A ranch in Australia would exert different influences from one in Arizona, as would a Bavarian village as opposed to one in Maine, or a London slum versus one in Chicago. It *matters* if "your" house is like all the others in the neighborhood, or if it is an elegant old brownstone standing alone among huge office buildings, or perhaps a remnant of better days with tenements right and left of it. The task of making everything particular is just as essential for something which is familiar as for that which is unfamiliar.

Examine your immediate surroundings. If silk, velvet and damask are a part of the room, from whose walls Rembrandts and Titians look back at you while a Bach cantata is being played on a record; if you walk on lush pile carpets and handle leatherbound volumes, pour tea from Meissen porcelain, pull tapestry bellcords to summon servants, and look through Belgian lace curtains at rolling lawns and landscaped gardens—"your" behavior will be powerfully and specifically influenced, and it will be influenced differently whether this is "your" way of life or "you" come to it as a stranger. Now consider that you are surrounded by cracked and peeling walls and ceilings, have wrinkled pop posters pasted to the walls, walk on bare floorboards, and sit on a rickety stool at an oilcloth-covered table in front of a lumpy burlap-covered studio couch, drinking beer from a can to the accompaniment of the Beatles and a leaky faucet, while you look out of the streaked window at a fire escape against a blackened brick wall. If you have truly considered each of these things and made them real to yourself, will "your" behavior (the choice and execution of your action of the dramatic events of the play) be influenced by these things? *Obviously!* There should

not be the tiniest thing around you which you have failed to make personal or relate to yourself *if* you want to soar into an exciting new life.

Try now to consider all the previous examples for *Place* (the ranch in Australia, the Bavarian village, the London slum, the room with Rembrandts and the Belgian lace, the room with the pop posters and bare floorboards, etc.), and condition them with *Time*. First try 1850 . . . in a blizzard . . . in February . . . in the middle of the night.

Then 1900 . . . in a heat wave . . . in July . . . at high noon.

Then 1950 . . . on a chilly morning . . . in April . . . at spring's awakening.

Then 1972 . . . in November . . . on election eve . . . during rain.

(Even if the time is "Anytime" or the place is "Limbo," you must create specific realities belonging to it—though you must never create a specific reality which might violate the playwright's time or place.)

The above exercises should make you understand how crucial WHEN and WHERE must become in your preparatory work.

Recently, I found my workbook for the role of Martha (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*), and wherever my notes pertain to *Time, Place,* and *Previous Circumstances,* I'll share some of them with you. They are, as I wrote them down, in random order. They may seem a little like Joyce's *Anna Livia Plurabelle.* The names George, Nick, Honey, and Daddy are characters in the play. Of course, Edward Albee wrote the play. All other names belong to my personal life and suggest possible substitutions. The equals (=) sign indicates my use of a substitution. The brackets enclose explanatory notes for you, the reader.

Late *Saturday* night. Late? As a matter of fact, 2 A.M. End of September = crackly red and yellow and brown leaves! *Frosty* night? Hot indoors? Edward means it all to be now. [1962] The new college term just opened. Booze! Football practice? Did I go this afternoon? Who's the coach? = Bradley. Yummy. New semester = faculty teas, heavy drinking at cocktail parties = tension, hysteria from new students, new faculty = the Johnstons, the Garricks, etc.

The party at Daddy's house tonight. A dozen new faculty members. Particularize them! Especially meeting with Nick and Honey = Marian and Dave? Or Marian and Bill? *How* did I show off?—how much to provoke George? Or to impress Daddy? I sang, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" I'll bet I read *Orlando* last week! [A novel by V. Woolf] I "brayed." *When?* What about? Boxing? History? Status?

We never discuss politics. Were George and I stung?—Remember McCarthy! [And I don't mean Eugene!] Am I aware of new political movements among young faculty members—like Nick? Or students? Do I try to participate with them? Uh-uh. Cynical, skeptical intellectuals—both George and me. Atheists. Agnostics? = Max and Alicia.

George in the History Department = Art History = Papa's assistants = power plays, like in corporations = also faculty wives jockeying for position = Jack S., maybe Ruth—Oh, yes, yes, yes.

The house is *messy.* Pretentiously unpretentious living! Ugh. Scatter rugs = Prof. Alex's house = Books piled sideways on shelves. Disorder, and = *unwatered* plants. Maybe an instrument lying open? Or the record player? Yes! Hahaha. Open and ready to go. Loose records lying around. The *Eroica?* Or the *Missa Solemnis?* Worn upholstery on "good" furniture. I think it's an *old* house—properly antiqued and comfy. Mortgaged? Is it a "home"? Nope. *Make* the neighborhood = mix together Adams St., Lathrop St., and Walton. *Make* the campus specific = mix up Ithaca, Madison, and Bennington = Faust [Prof. Albert Faust, my uncle].

This town is New Carthage. What was *old* Carthage? I re-

member some Roman, like Caesar, said, "Carthage must be destroyed!" Edward's symbols? How apt!! Too intellectual for me—can't use it!!! I was born and raised in New Carthage = Wisc. High, maybe Randall school. Grew up in Daddy's—college pres.—mansion = Phil R's house. Did I brag about the mansion? Did I feel lonely there? Did I like somebody else's "home" better? = Jane Mc. Where am I vulnerable to Daddy? When I was little? Now? Vulnerable to George? What areas? Not just *age*.

Make the street = elms, maples, burnt-orange mums—eeek! Neighbors = the W's, they weren't faculty, more conventional. When we come home, George says, "Sssshhh, the neighbors!" Can they hear us making a racket even when we're in the house? During the play?

Make the rest of the house. Have to work on the *bedroom!* The kitchen!—with Nick. The bathroom with Honey! Where do I usually park in the living room? My favorite chair? Are there toys around for our "child"????? Daddy's portrait or photo? Ask Edward if I can use one of Papa. Wow! . . .

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RELATIONSHIP

re·la'tion·ship *1. Connection; the state of being related. 2. Kinship. *5. The mode in which one thing stands to another. *6. State of being mutually or reciprocally interested.

AFTER studying the play, you have determined your character's relationship to the theme of the play. You have established your character's relationship to the other characters in the play in terms of the protagonist and the antagonist: you have taken sides. Now you have to define the relationships in detail and bring them into focus from your character's point of view. Then you have to find substitutions in order to make your character's viewpoint about the other characters in the play "your" own!

Once you have understood that the smallest *inanimate* object on stage must be made particular and personal by endowing it with the required physical and emotional properties so that even a secondary action dealing with it will have meaning and pertinence for the character, you will see the immensity of the task of making particular and real another human being confronting you. It *is* complex to make the

characters you come in conflict with during your life on stage *actively* real to you! Your aim must be to bring about pertinent *inter*action between yourself and the others.

If you work correctly on your relationships in the play, when your lover touches your cheek, your flesh may tingle as you offer your lips. When your boss fires you, you may get hot under the collar as you inform him that you had already planned to resign. When your son insults you, you might redden with humiliation before putting him in his place. You will shiver with irritation as your girl friend files her nails, until you start singing to drown out the rasping. When you are proposed to, your heart will probably start to pound before you accept. If you have only *assumed* your relationship to the other characters or taken them for granted, you will find only dry, mechanical actions. To find genuine, electrified action you have to endow your relationships with all the elements that constitute a specific relationship and make yourself vulnerable to these elements. Then pit yourself against the other characters, and go!

In almost all human relationships—or at least in certain areas of a relationship—one person dominates and the other submits; one person leads and the other follows. Start with this: Ask yourself how "you" (the character) stand in relation to the other characters. Are you willingly or unwillingly leading or following? Ask yourself in which specific areas. In love? At work? At home? In public? In all of them?

To begin with, define your relationships in broad terms. I love him. I hate her. We are close, like brothers. He's like a parent. We compete like jealous rivals. Is it a relationship of entanglement or indifference? Do you look up to him or down at him? In which areas? Are you afraid of her, or she of you? In which areas? Is the relationship—whether it be one of competition, love, hostility, maneuvering or trading for advantage and position—declared and open, or is it hidden and

subconscious? Is it a relationship of pretended closeness with secret distrust? And always ask if it is *reciprocal* or if you are at *opposites*.

Clearly, this broad labeling of basic relationships is founded on circumstances (the length of the relationship and the events which brought you to the present relationship, the way of life—wealth or poverty, work or leisure, the kind of work, etc.) and human needs. The circumstances and needs are based on your character's responsibilities and obligations to the others and his willingness or unwillingness to fulfill them.

Then go further into areas of agreement and disagreement, such as assumptions (right or wrong) which you have about the other characters and which they may have about "you"; your feelings and bias about each other. Explore the past from your first meeting with each other down to the details of your first confrontation. Or, if it is a first meeting in the play, what makes the sparks fly between you (Romeo and Juliet!)?

Then begin the detailed work of examining "your" most intimate likes and dislikes of the others. Do you like or dislike that your lover is a sentimental romantic? Do you enjoy your husband's warring aspects or are you repelled by them? Do you go for his rumpled tweeds and tangy cologne or do they put your teeth on edge? Do you melt when his dimple appears or does it embarrass you? Which of his idiosyncrasies send you and which annoy you? If someone you love shows off in public how does it affect you? (Most people withdraw and become silent, almost antisocial as a result. I used this for Georgie Elgin in *The Country Girl* as she was pitched against her husband. It also works the other way; if you're in a public situation with someone close to you who is antisocial, you compensate by becoming aggressively outgoing.)

Finding identification with the antagonist of the piece

seems to present greater problems for the actor than when he plays the protagonist. The actor often falls into the trap of evaluating the "villain" and pitting him against the "hero" rather than revealing the human being he must play. You must *justify* your character, not judge him, or you will fall into one of two traps. Either you will soften and sentimentalize the character to prove that *"I'm* not really like this," or you will bring about illustrative actions to tell an audience "look how evil *he* is." Because the author has sympathetically justified the behavior of the protagonist it is sometimes difficult for the actor playing the antagonist not to be seduced by this knowledge. To construct a balance between you and the protagonist you have to know *more* about your own needs and *less* about the needs of the others. Otherwise, as antagonist, you will fail in making your relationship to the protagonist through your own character's eyes.

Suppose you are playing the mother in *Look Homeward, Angel,* and you have to throw out your son's true love and tie him to your boardinghouse apron strings, ignoring his sensitivities and artistic needs. You must not identify with *his* problems, but rather, back up the facts for your *own* needs. "You" *do* have to work at least twelve hours a day to keep a roof over his head while dealing with endless, difficult boarders. That girl *is* older and more experienced than he is and may create a burdensome trap for him. He *is* immature and impractical, etc. If you have backed up your needs, when you have to accuse him, or pick on him, or boss him around, you will have justification for your actions and no need to judge them.

Or take the mother in *Butterflies Are Free,* whom the playwright depicts as intruding on her blind son's fight for freedom and independence. The actress, in finding a correct relationship to him, must not forget that he *is* blind, has been undone by a previous love, and might be heading for disaster

without his mother's help and supervision. She must evaluate his problems through "her" eyes, not his. The son, on the other hand, often particularizes the relationship to his mother only as an intruding one, and fails to include his love for her, his previous dependence on her; consequently, he omits the obstacle which will make for the genuine actions of his relationship to her.

A relationship can develop and change even *before* we have met up with a stranger. Imagine that I have a script which I ask you to deliver for me. I tell you that I would like you to bring it to Ada Bloom, a literary agent who also handles actors. Her office is on West 56th Street, between Broadway and 7th Avenue. Tell her that I sent you, that you are an actor, and ask if she has any parts for which she might submit you. You will immediately conceive an Ada Bloom in your mind's eye, how she looks, is dressed, speaks, and even how you plan to impress her. You will start speculating on how you will announce yourself. You will visualize the office and its decor. Before you get uptown, your expectations about Miss Bloom, the office, as well as your plan of attack, will have changed at least ten times.

I have invented Miss Bloom. To me she is short and stocky, with cropped hair, and she is wearing a gray serge suit. She is aggressive and hostile. My plan of action is to pounce, and assert myself before she can put me off. Now suppose, as I burst into the office, I am greeted by a tall, round-faced, soft-haired, motherly lady. I have to make speedy readjustments. My expectations change. My attack turns to pussy-footing until I am counteracted by a slight rejection and gentle aloofness. My expectations change again and so does my action. In other words, our relationships to others begin the moment we hear about someone.

Occasionally, the actor mistakenly looks for one person in his personal life to serve as a substitution for his total rela-

tionship to a character in a play. It is highly unlikely that he will find a real-life parallel right down the line for all the areas and aspects of the character relationship. It is more likely that he will need aspects of twenty relationships in his life, linked to a variety of experiences in order to create this new relationship in the play. He may need a hundred. For Georgie's relationship to Frank Elgin, I used my father, my child, several crushes and many past loves. As Martha, in order to create the love-hate relationship to George in *Who's Afraid . . .*, I had to isolate *moments* of many relationships in which challenge, vengeance, wounding and vulnerability were at stake. A *composite* of the old will make for the new in relationships.

However thoroughly the actor constructs his relationships to the other characters and however precisely he makes his substitutions, they will not help him a bit if he keeps them in his head. He must use them to receive from, and be vulnerable to, the characters he confronts in order to free the necessary actions. Only when the considered relationships and the substitutions for them lead the actor to actual receiving and then *doing* something, physically and verbally, to the other characters will the results have value.

AGE

The problem of your character's age properly belongs under your considerations for "Who am I?" However, establishing it with faith is so closely linked to your relationships to the other characters in the play that I have reserved it for this chapter.

As our theater is set up, the chance is rare that you will play someone far removed from your own age. In amateur companies, summer stock and drama schools, you will still find the young actor employing the old clichés—the hunched

posture, the wobbly head, the cracked voice, and the cornstarched hair—which are supposed to symbolize old age. You will also see the twenty-year-old actor portraying a teenager as if he were a retarded five-year-old, with toes pointed inward, elbows and wrists crooked outward, while lisping his words in a small squeaky voice.

Aside from these obvious technical errors, we have strange notions and misconceptions of age, even in our daily lives. And then we apply these misconceptions to the play, even when the age of our character is within easy range. I knew a twenty-eight-year-old actress who was convinced she was too young to play the forty-year-old Ruth in *Epitaph for George Dillon.* Actually, she only needed to concentrate on the *difference* in age between herself and George Dillon to find a belief in her required age. (In other words, she had to make him about ten years younger than herself.) I also tried to assure her that once having arrived at the ripe old age of forty she wouldn't feel the slightest bit different from the way she did now, nor would she look much different—certainly not across the footlights. To make my point, I also asked her to remember honestly how she felt (or looked) in her late *teens.* Was there a difference? No—although her evaluation of *other* teenagers from her present vantage point might be that they were "just kids!"

There are a few general guideposts to the extremes of age which can be of use. The infirmities which set in with old age come from the fact that *something* is weakening—the joints, the feet, the back, etc. (inner organs don't show). If you *must* play someone who is very old when you are still young, work for a weakness or an ache in one area of your body to bring about an appropriate physicalization (obviously coupled with skillfully executed makeup). It will serve you better than the clichés of old age.

Physically, the "awkwardness" of youth usually stems

from insecurities about social expectations, and an attempt to imitate notions of adult behavior. Sometimes the clothes are too large because they are new, or too small because they are old. Physical and psychological adjustments to clothing, and the relationship to social expectations are essential to dealing with the problem of youth.

Our psychological relationship to others often makes us *feel* that we are younger or older. When I was young, I had a friend who was in his late seventies. He seemed like my contemporary (and I'm sure he felt as though he were) as he joined in with my interests in *now* and in tomorrow. At the same time, I also had a friend in her early forties who seemed like my grandmother as she continuously referred to her age. "I'm so old," she would say, and finish off any argument with, "When you're *my* age you'll know. . . ." She seemed to deal only with the past. Remember that when you were ten, someone who was twenty seemed very adult. At twenty, someone aged forty seemed to be "getting on!" A twenty-year-old is at a ripe old age to himself until he pits himself against a fifty-year-old, who in turn, feels that the other is "just a kid."

What is primarily at stake is that you must find identification with the age of your character. Within yourself you have a rather broad range of years at your disposal. Your character's age will be established by a self-image which may change when placed in relationship to someone older or younger than yourself.

I do a demonstration in class in which I use a student for a partner. The first time I assume that he is Alfred Lunt. We meet and shake hands. I always turn red, and get damp palms, and am on the verge of a bobbing curtsy as our hands meet. In that moment I feel eighteen, inside and out. Then I meet the same student and shake hands, this time assuming he is a rather impertinent friend of my daughter's. I am *tall,*

a little condescending and definitely my own age! Occasionally, I add a third handshake with the student and make believe he is Gérard Philipe. No idolotrous teenager confronted with her most worshiped movie star could match my idiotic assault, accompanied by knocking knees.

In your relationship to the other characters in the play, it now becomes obvious that age is a powerful influence. How you deal with the others will spring from your adjustment, among other things, to the fact that you feel they are older or younger than you are; that they merit your respect or are beneath your interest; that they should be coddled because they are younger or older; that they can be sloughed off because they are younger or older. Your related age differences should create specifics in action.

Your adjustments relating to your character's age must, of course, also be aligned to his work, his loves, attachments and appetites, whether they be innocent, knowing, familiar or jaded.

Note that I have not discussed the problem pointed out by the master-technician who claims—usually rightly so—that a young actor may be outwardly the correct age for the part, but that he's not ready to play it in terms of understanding or craft. St. Joan was nineteen when she died. I was thirty-one when I played her. Years later, Dame Sybil Thorndike, who created the role, asked me when I was going to play the part again. I told her I thought I was too old. She replied, "You can only be too *young* for Joan!" Unhappily, the magic of Duse or Ruth Draper, each of whom could transform herself into a young enchantress without covering a silver hair or using makeup, is not only rare but seldom allowed a test in our theater of typecasting.

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THE OBJECTIVE

ob·jec'tive **1.** Pertaining to the object or end. ***3.** Something aimed at or striven for.

THE ACTIONS of human beings are governed, more than anything else, by what they *want,* consciously or subconsciously. In order to make the hunt for the objectives of the character specific, I divide them into three categories: (1) the overall character objectives; (2) the character's objectives for the individual scenes of the play; (3) the character's moment-to-moment objectives within the scenes.

Certainly, the exploration of the overall objectives is a part of the work on "Who am I?" (No human being *is* without having wants and drives.) Now, in asking, "What do I want?" consciously and subconsciously, and in finding the answers, it becomes evident that I must know more about the character I am going to play than the character knows about himself. (The greater your insight into human needs becomes, the better an actor you will be.) First, ask the questions about character objectives in broad terms. What do I want—in relationship to the world, to my work, to the people in my life? Answers might be: I want to be famous, to make

my mark, to be in command, to be needed by others, etc. Or: I want security, a family, protection, to hide from the world, etc. These larger objectives must align themselves with the character's function in the play as protagonist or antagonist, and therefore also serve the objective of the play itself.

If the larger objectives of the character seem alien to me, I look for substitutions as soon as possible. If Medea's need for revenge seems far removed from me—and it *does!*—my remembrance of having been wronged by Joseph McCarthy, and a surging need to get even (although I never acted on this need) can be enough of a springboard for a full psychological identification with the need to revenge myself on Jason.

With the character's overall objectives in mind, the next step is to look for the character's main need or objective for each scene in the play. It should be linked to the events and allow the dramatic conflict to move forward. It should act as a lamp and illuminate the path that must be traveled in the scene. For example, if you need to get across a river, simply *wishing* you were on the other side won't get you there. The need or the wish must light up the possibilities of what to do to fulfill that wish. Will you swim, take a boat, walk on the rocks, or look for a bridge?

These smaller objectives (concerning themselves with the need for a boat—finding oars, bailing out water, wanting to push the boat from the shore—or wanting to locate rocks, testing their slipperiness and size, considering the need to jump from one to another, or wanting to test your prowess against the current or even rapids of the river, or its depth) constitute the *beats* of the scene. A beat begins under a given set of circumstances when an immediate objective sets in. It ends when that objective has succeeded or failed and new circumstances set in.

I heard a delightful but unverified story about the term

beats. Stanislavsky is supposed to have called them "bits," but when explaining them in English with his Russian accent, it sounded like "beats." To me, "bits" fall to pieces. I prefer "beats," which have a pulse as in music. They move ahead, and are connected with something at both ends, with something that has happened and something still to come!

If balancing a conscious objective against a subconscious one poses a riddle in putting it to work, I will give you an example of how I work on it. In Turgenev's *A Month in the Country,* Natalia Petrovna, who is conveniently married to a kind landowner and has a lovely child and an elegant entourage, has main drives (objectives) to have a cultivated and gracious life. She wants to be accepted as an intelligent, generous woman, and she pursues romance in every sense of the word. Her child has a charming young tutor, and without being aware of it, Natalia falls madly in love with him. In a devastating scene with her seventeen-year-old ward, Vera, Natalia tries to make a match between the ward and a fat, old, rich neighbor. Her conscious objective is to provide security and protection for her ward. Her subconscious objective is to get Vera out of the house and away from the tutor because she is jealous of Vera's youth and seeming interest in the tutor. A woman who consciously connives to ruin the life of a young girl would be monstrous and selfish. A woman who does it subconsciously is humanly fallible. There is a point, later in the play, when Natalia's subconscious objective breaks through into her conscious awareness, and her objective becomes to punish herself for her baseness.

(The conscious objective is usually aligned with one's self-image and sense of morality. Consciously, we almost always want to behave well—nobly, with kindness and consideration for others. We sometimes consciously look for *any* justification for ignoble acts into which our subconscious desires may have sent us.)

First, I try to work *openly* on the subconscious needs by looking for all the actions which might spring from them: dealing with Vera as an acknowledged rival—putting her down, challenging her, proving my superiority to her, while allowing her to move in on my senses as a giant irritant. When I have found consequent actions, I bury them and pursue only the actions which have to do with the conscious need to protect her, to ensure her future, to prove my love and kindness to her. The conscious objective is always influenced powerfully by my early work on the subconscious; consequently, I don't have to burden myself with double mental considerations while playing. This is my way of supplying a correct balance. I have observed other actors who have successfully reversed the procedure by working on the conscious objective as their first guide to the actions before making considerations for the subconscious. Mine is simply a personal preference.

If the objectives in all three categories remain factual, and do not set me on a hunt for actions, no matter how true or relevant they may be, I sometimes find the correct stimulus simply by rephrasing. For instance, instead of a need to be alone, I might find that a fight for freedom or a desire to get away from those who burden me is immediately suggestible.

Occasionally, another confusion arises between what you *have* to do and what you *want* to do. Don't confuse an obligation with a desire. Actions which result when I *have* to clean house are totally different from those when I *want* to clean house. Always define your real objectives with wants, needs, desires. What you *have* to do may be an obstacle to what you want.

In the architecture of constructing the character, the objectives are a powerful part of the basic structure. They must be sought out with strong, personal identification if

they are to provide a solid foundation for the work on the action.

In summation for the objective let me use, as an example, Shaw's *Saint Joan.*

The objective of the play is clearly stated in Shaw's preface when he emphasizes his need to destroy the sentimental, romantic legend of the wispy, watery-eyed, holy girl by coming to grips with the human facts of the sturdy, strong-willed peasant. Through intense faith, native wit, and a giant sense of right and of herself, she turned France from a satellite into a nation, and pitted herself against the established government and the corrupted church as almost the first nationalist and the first protestor or *protest*ant. An endless variety of broad character objectives present themselves: to serve God; to save France; to do away with lies and weakness; to make a good life for the people of France; to win. Subconscious objectives might concern themselves with a need to prove herself a leader; to prove herself right at any cost; to assert power. There might even be the fulfillment of sensual needs: to give her body to armor, to battle, to the physicality of combat.

As I am personally not a nationalist or religious in a church sense, these objectives might be translated into a need to save the theater, a need to beard the merchants of art in their dens. I might use my admired colleague Fritz Weaver for the Dauphin, and confront him with his ultimate responsibility of assuming his throne in a pure theater. I might force my friend Eli Wallach, instead of Dunois, across the river to battle (instead of the English), the money lenders of the theater and the real-estate owners who have usurped our rights. I might find a powerful objective to serve my art instead of God. Et cetera.

In scene 1 of the play, I need to make a first step, a first conquest. I need to win over De Baudricourt. I want to force

him to give me horses and an escort to the court of the Dauphin. In the individual beats, I want to gain entrance; then I want to confront De Baudricourt; I want to bully him; then wheedle him into acquiescence. In the second scene, I need to persuade the Dauphin that he must assert himself, and that he must supply me with an army. In the beats, when I arrive at the Dauphin's court, I must first find *him* (Which one is he among all the courtiers pretending to be him?), and then I need to get him alone, and then I need to find him out as a person, etc.

And I still have one other big job ahead of me before I can start the work on the actions. What's the obstacle? What's in the way of what I want?

26

THE OBSTACLE

ob'sta·cle ***1.** That which stands in the way or opposes; a hindrance, an obstruction to one's progress.

IF I KNOW what I want and can achieve my wishes readily without any problem, there is no drama. In tragedy and comedy and satire and farce—in anything that is worthy of the stage—conflict is at the root. Consequently, finding the obstacles to my objectives becomes imperative. I have to look for the crisis, the conflict, the clash of wills—the drama.

What's in the way of what I want? Who's against me? What's against me? Pose these questions against your character objectives, against your main objectives, and against your immediate objectives in the beats of the scenes. Your needs should strengthen in the desire to overcome the obstacles. Remember the old adage that something difficult to obtain is always more strongly desired than something readily available. The obstacle itself will strongly influence what you must *do* to overcome it in the pursuit of the objective.

There are obstacles within the overall character objectives. For example, I want to become a great artist. I want to

maintain high ideals. I want to avoid the tawdry and the commercial aspects of art. (How many of you have a passionate objective to make your mark in the theater, but balk at the ugly aspects of making the "rounds"?) Suppose your main objective in the scene is to win the part at the audition, *but* your competitor is your best friend. In the immediate objective of the first beat, you want to fix yourself up to look right for the part, but your mirror is broken. Can you borrow one from your best friend? Your competitor?

Obstacles will be inherent in, or spring from any element of, the given material: from the character itself; from something in the past and present circumstances; from the relationships and opposing objectives of the other characters; from the events; from the surroundings; and from the objects themselves.

Here is a simple example of selections for the obstacle. You want to set the table for important guests. First, try to set the table without an obstacle, while you are observed, to discover how you have to fight for concentration, and how time drags, and how involvement becomes a major problem. Then test your objective against an *obstacle* coming from:

1. *Character:* You are a perfectionist, but you are fearful of failure. Now try to set a *perfect* table.
2. *Your past:* You have had a pampered life surrounded by servants, and have never set a table before. Or you come from a slum and have only recently joined the middle class. You aren't certain of the proper placement of flatware, dishes, glasses and napkins.
3. *Time:* You have only five minutes in which to do it.
4. *The objects:* The dishes are elegant and borrowed. Or they are chipped, cheap, don't match, or there aren't enough to go around.

5. *Circumstances:* Your husband is asleep in the next room. The dinner is a surprise, and you don't want him to hear you.
6. *The relationship:* The guests are your husband's employers or relatives. They are very fussy, and you need to impress them.
7. *Place:* The room is small, and the table hasn't enough space for the number of settings you require.
8. *Weather:* There's a heat wave or a cold snap. No air-conditioner. Broken furnace.
9. Et cetera.

Try setting the table using these obstacles. Watch what happens!

In the attempt to overcome the obstacle the nature of the actions starts to become evident, and in the struggle to overcome it your will should strengthen. If the door you want to open is stuck, your temperature rises!

Actors continuously ask, "But is there *always* an obstacle?" Yes! Obviously, the obstacle must always be logical to the character in the given circumstances. I'm not recommending that you hunt for a score that will match *The Perils of Pauline*. But if the obstacle isn't inherently clear to you, you'd better find one!

I have another favorite demonstration. My circumstances are seemingly ideal. My lover has just proposed. He's rich. We have all interests in common. Our parents adore the idea that we are getting married. The minister is available. The weather is great. We both look gorgeous. No obstacle! The director says, "Jump up in the air for joy." I do. I feel like a fool. *Then* I decide that gravity is my obstacle, that I want to jump up, but can't get as high as I want. I *leap* up and push against gravity, and my heart begins to pound and I laugh aloud with delight!

The Obstacle

Even if you are a character who has to *sleep* during the play, you can establish an obstacle. Explore the lumpy mattress, the narrowness of the bed, the hardness of the pillow or—"To sleep, perchance to *dream*. Ay, there's the rub!"

27

THE ACTION

ac'tion *1. The doing of something; being in motion or operation. 2. An act done. *3. Behavior, conduct. *4. The influence or effect of something on something else. 5. An event or series of events, real or imagined, forming the subject of a play.

OCCASIONALLY, after doing all the other preparatory work, an actor still doesn't seem to understand what a real action is. It is *not* "stage business" or being "busy," or posing physically, or setting words with mechanical inflections, or illustrating verbal ideas, or making mechanical "shapes" for the stage life of the character. Nor is an action an illustration of an attitude or a mood. Nor is acting "*re*acting," as so many old pros insist.

"Acting" is *doing! Everything* I have dealt with up to this point should lead to action. Even the object exercises and their specific technical problems should have served you in the discovery of the awareness of genuine action. All of the homework and the rehearsal work for the exploration of the play, the work on sense memory, the hunt for the character and identification through substitutions, the search for the

circumstances, the relationships, the objectives and obstacles *must have their consequence in actions* or nothing has been of value. The sum total of the actions (what you *do* from moment to moment) reveals your character. The selection of the actions must tell the story of the body and soul of your character, the new "you"! Your selection and execution will also be the determining factor of the degree of your artistry.

I have assiduously avoided the word *attitude* throughout this book, not because human beings don't have them, but because actors so often confuse attitudes with actions, or put them in, in the place of actions. The misguided actor predetermines an attitude toward a given person, object, circumstance or event; he even finds an objective and then rides or floats toward it with his "attitude." He mistakenly thinks he is in action. Instead of the word *"attitude,"* I have deliberately used words such as *particularizations, likes, dislikes* and *adjustments* to the person, the object, the circumstance, the relationship, etc. If you find particular adjustments to these elements and load them for yourself, they will condition the *nature* of the action which should be operative in overcoming the obstacles and get you to your objective.

You can strike the word *attitude* from your vocabulary because it can't be played. I get so single-minded about this misunderstanding that I recommend my own way of avoiding the danger. I first retype the script to eliminate *any* adjectives of the stage direction. Or, at my first reading of the play, I cross them out so heavily that I can't possibly see them. "Angrily," "sadly," "gloomily," "gladly," "smilingly," "passionately," "shyly," etc., do not belong in *anybody's* acting score. They are *not* actions! If you should happen to smile or frown or feel sad or glad or furious or frustrated or shy or loving, it will be a *result* of your particularizations for each object, person, event or circumstance—and the result of the give and take of the actions! If you select adjectives as a part

of your acting score, you will simply make faces, strike poses, and guarantee that you *won't* be in action!

Shakespeare gives the actor no adjectives. Goody! In contemporary plays it is a different matter. When the printed version of *The Country Girl* came out there were even more descriptions than in the original manuscript. I asked Clifford Odets about this. He explained that the original script was not intended for the actors but for the financial backers of the production. As most of them were unimaginative and didn't really know how to read a play, he put in the descriptions for them. He said that the hard-cover version was for just plain readers, not doers. He inserted pages of description which he took directly from the final, staged production. One example fascinated me in particular. During a rehearsal of a fight scene between my husband, Frank Elgin, and myself, when I was threatening to walk out on him, I reached for my coat. By accident, the sleeve was inside out, and I had a big struggle with it. It helped the action of the scene for me so I asked the stage manager (who had to preset the coat on stage) to make certain that the sleeve was always inverted. In the printed text of the play Clifford Odets had a description of Georgie snatching her coat from the chair, struggling with the sleeve, turning red with suppressed rage, yanking the coat over her shoulder, fighting back tears while accusing Frank of having lied and humiliated her, etc. Why in the world should another actress be asked to repeat either the adjectives *or* the sleeve when she might come up with something of her own? Cross out these descriptions, and let your own sense of character guide you. An experienced actor learns to read the play for the human intentions, without the descriptions.

Settling for the "mood" is as dangerous as going for an attitude. Spelled backwards, it is *doom* for the actor. A mood *results* from the sum total of the actions. But trying to "get into the mood" or playing it can only lead to mush!

Discovering a *real* action, a *real* doing, is the continuous and constant work on the part. "What do I do to get what I want?" "How do I get what I want?" (By doing what?) "What do I do to overcome the obstacles, and how do I overcome them?" (By doing what?) Look for active verbs!

(Many actors and teachers reject the word *how* because they believe it leads to adjectives rather than actions. Grammatically, *how* is an adverb. My favorite, Mr. Webster, defines *how* this way: "1. By what means? 2. For what purpose? 3. To what effect?" My *means, purpose,* or *to what effect* cannot be answered by *gladly,* by *smilingly,* or by *angrily!*)

The cold might make me *reach* for a sweater or a coat; the rain might make me *duck* or *open* an umbrella; the heat might make me *mop* my brow or *take off* my blouse; the quiet might make me *tiptoe* or *skirt* the squeaking floorboards; the time might make me *start running;* old age might make me *limp* or *cover* my wrinkles or *dye* my hair; my youth might make me *don* high heels; a mouse might make me *jump;* an enemy might lead me to *challenge* him; an insult might make me *fight;* my fear might make me *hide*—if it so fits. Otherwise, all of these considerations have been for nothing. To get someone's attention, you can *stare* or *fix* on him (not just *shout* at him) so intently with your eyes that he must look back at you. To win someone over, you can *butter* him *up, break down* his defenses, *stroke* him, *bully* him, etc. These are primitive examples, but they should clarify how you must be propelled into action, into the animation of body and words. My old friend, the cat, following the lint with its eyes and considering whether or not to pounce, is in powerful action even before the actual pounce.

Really doing something is quite different from mechanically doing it, or simply clicking off mentally that you're doing it, or showing the audience that you're doing it. When you are *really* in action, you are engrossed in the action and

alert to its possible effect on the object toward which the action is directed. In the execution of the action, you are not seeing or listening to yourself, you are not watching "how." You should leave yourself wide open—with expectations—as to what the result of the action will be. Will it succeed or fail? What will be done back to you by the person or object which will then propel you into the next doing?

I like to make a comparison between a sporting event such as fencing, Ping-Pong, tennis or boxing, and an acting scene. In your athletic contest, if you watch your wrist or fingers, or stance, or your own lunge, or how prettily you serve, neither your foil, ball or fist will reach its mark. If you watch yourself *after* lunging or sending the ball or the fist, your opponent will catch you off-guard or stab you to death. Curtain!—for the athlete and the actor long before the end of the play.

The fulfillment of your character's wishes juxtaposed against the circumstances and the other characters' wishes entails real sending and receiving. Cause and effect, receiving and doing something about what you receive in response to an assumption, or an imaginary stimulus—this is what acting is all about.

Actions, from the largest to the smallest, can be defined and divided exactly as they have been divided into the three categories for the objectives and the obstacles: overall character actions to overcome overall obstacles in order to fulfill overall objectives; the main action to overcome the main obstacle and achieve the main objective; and finally, the immediate action to overcome the immediate obstacle and fulfill the objective within the individual beats of the scene.

Always work positively. Don't search for what the character *won't* or *wouldn't* do, but what he *might* or *must* do. Test

the action by seeing if it really gets you where you want. Only dismiss it if it has no before and after. Then look for another one.

Here are some possible examples based on Lyubov Andreyevna in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard.*

Overall character objectives [*obstacles*] *and overall actions*

1. I want to hang onto the past. (The society is changing.) I will clutch at and grapple with all romantic memories. I will turn memories into tangibles.
2. I want to keep my home and the cherry orchard. (They are mortgaged. I am deeply in debt.) I will try to woo and win over creditors and prospective buyers, pull rank. I will shut out the crumbling and cracking, and turn it back into a romantic "estate."
3. I want to fight every unpleasant reality. (Bickering servants. Miserable, lonely poor relations. Endless responsibilities.) I will deal through a veil with my loved ones and make ideal promises to one and all. I will shut out and ignore and tear up all practical obstacles as though they did not exist.
4. I need my lover. (He's in Paris, the relationship is teetering. He's on the run. He borrows from me, uses me.) I will work hard to delude myself. I will romanticize the best in him. I will write, pursue him, make him need me.
5. I want to be an ideal woman and mother. (I am selfish, need to assert my own needs, need the attention and admiration of my child and all around me. I want them to accommodate themselves to my needs.) I will hug and hold and give and pamper—and demand.
6. I want to delay all goodbyes. (Everyone and everything is changing, aging, leaving.) I will hang on.

Scene One. Main objectives [*obstacles*] *and actions of the homecoming.*

To reaffirm my memories. I want to bring back the last time. I want to cope ideally with the changes and shut out the obstacles. (I've traveled for days with little sleep. It's dawn. Everyone else is tired, some are irritable, some hysterically overpowering. The room, my nursery is changed around. A nouveau-riche peasant neighbor is waiting, etc.) My main actions might be to beg for recognition, to make myself ideal in their eyes, to clutch, to stroke, to reach out for tenderness and comfort.

THE FIRST BEAT. I want to get *in*—the nursery. (The dogs are barking, everyone is making noise, storming in on me.) I will touch on and drink in every object, every memory connected with it—sensorily. I will look for comfort—for my orchard—etc.

The selection of the actions is like an orchestration for the theme. The individual actions are like the notes which make up the beats. The beats make up the phrase, the phrases complete the movement, and the movements make up the symphony.

My greatest theater memories are of the unforgettable ***actions*** of the great actors. What stayed with me was not so much that their actions were theatrically "effective," but that they were overpoweringly selective in revealing to me something about a human being. In Duse's film, *Ashes,* her confrontation with her grown son after she has become a prostitute and is destitute leads her to a deep bow before him, her head almost touching the ground in deep shame and self-abasement which asks for his forgiveness. Even on the ***recording*** of John Barrymore's *Hamlet* it isn't just his active shriek of "Vengeance!" which one remembers, but the sound of ***the action*** of his ripping the king's cloak in half!